

Magic Elizabeth

written by Norma Kassirer

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Chapter Three: The Picture

a breakfast serials story

THE STORY SO FAR: *Eight-year-old Sally has just arrived at her great Aunt Sarah's house while her parents and caregiver are away. Aunt Sarah not only looks and acts like a witch, but has a spooky black cat named Shadow.*

Sally stood beside the long wooden kitchen table while her aunt quickly removed pans from the stove and filled dishes



stood near the table. The chair legs squeaked over the linoleum, and Sally looked anxiously across the table, fearing that Aunt Sarah might say she was scratching the floor. But Aunt Sarah said nothing.

Shadow wove his way under the table, brushing against Sally's legs from time to time and then darting across the kitchen floor. When Sally at last put her knife and fork across her plate and looked up, her aunt's harsh voice spoke. "Didn't eat much, Sally."

"I'm not very hungry," said Sally in a small voice that rose to an unfamiliar squeak on the last word.

Aunt Sarah stood up. It seemed to take some effort to unfold herself from the chair. "I think then that you'd better go up to bed," she said gruffly.

Sally followed her aunt into the hall once more. Aunt Sarah had switched on some more lights, and Sally could now see that the entrance to the living room was hung with the oddest curtains she had ever seen. They were made of tiny colored beads on long strings, hanging close together. The beads moved and made a gentle clicking sound as Sally and her aunt passed. Sally could just glimpse dimly beyond them the curving backs of chairs and sofas. And she heard too, as they passed, from somewhere deep inside the room, a very delicate musical sound, faint and rather trembling.

"The melodeon. Always does that when the floor shakes. Used to play it when I was your age." Sally was too astounded at such a wealth of information from Aunt Sarah to

and glasses. There were appetizing odors and comforting bubbling sounds coming from the stove. If she had not been so frightened, Sally would have offered to help, as she did at home with her mother. But she had no idea how she ought to behave with this strange lady, and so she said nothing at all.

"Waited dinner for you," said her aunt's gruff voice. "Had enough for Mrs. Chipley, too. I thought she'd at least want a cup of tea before she left. But everyone's in a hurry hurry hurry these days. Sit down."

Since she and Mrs. Chipley had eaten dinner before leaving home, Sally was not at all hungry, but she did not dare to mention it. She sat down, pushing back a chair which

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ask what a melodeon was.

The stairway was longer than any Sally had ever climbed before. It went on and on, twisting and turning, and each time that Sally thought they must be at the top there was another turn, and more stairs, leading up and up. Shadow followed along behind them, almost as silent as a real shadow.

Sally had become aware of a very loud ticking sound that increased in volume as they went up the stairs. At last, finding herself in a long hallway lined with many doors on either side, she saw, down at the far end, a solemn-looking grandfather clock as tall as the ceiling.

The floor of the hall was covered by a gray carpet patterned with enormous red flowers. Shadow sat on one of the flowers and gave a huge yawn, which ended in a high, petulant meow. The sound echoed down the hallway, and Sally shivered and began to yawn too.

Sally's aunt opened one of the doors and showed her into the room that would be hers. It was the prettiest room Sally had ever seen, its furniture painted pale blue, its brass bed covered with a ruffled yellow spread, and yellow curtains at the windows. Sally placed her suitcase on the floor next to the bed. She felt too shy to say, "This is a very pretty room."

Sally looked up at an oil painting that hung over a little green marble fireplace. It was a picture of a girl about Sally's own age, with long red hair, a sprinkle of freckles over the nose, and round greenish eyes. She wore a yellow bonnet tied with ribbons beneath her chin, a long pale-blue dress with three layers of ruffles, and high-buttoned shoes. The girl was holding a rag doll on her lap and she was looking down at it as if she loved it very much. The doll's hair was long, and was made of what seemed to be thick strands of golden thread. It had a painted pink mouth curled into a smile at the corners. The eyes were a deep blue, the pleasant shape of watermelon seeds, and painted on with a very thin brush so that each golden eyelash showed. The doll was wearing a long blue

dress and small high-buttoned shoes, and even a yellow bonnet, exactly like those worn by its mistress. Its hands were tucked into a tiny white fur muff. It was the most adorable doll Sally had ever seen, and in less than a moment she had fallen in love with it.

"I see," said Aunt Sarah, pointing with a sharp finger that seemed to slice the soft air in the pretty room, "that you're looking at the picture."

Sally nodded.

"That was a girl who lived in this house a long time ago. She must have been about your age when the picture was painted. This was her room." She lowered her arm abruptly, as if she were a mechanical toy that had run down. "Some of those old things in the picture are stored in the attic," she murmured.

Sally stared at the girl in the picture. She was smiling, so that a dimple deepened in her left cheek. Sally had not noticed that before. It was almost as if the girl's expression had changed, just a little, since she had first looked at the picture.

to be continued ...

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