

MAGIC
IS FOR WHEN
YOU NEED IT

FLORENCE PETHERAM



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CHAPTER ONE

BIG CHANGE

IT WAS TOO late now. She saw *that look* on her mother's face and Mandy knew exactly what it meant. No way was she going to change her mind. Here she was standing on the sidewalk in front of her house, packed and ready to go, and *that look* started to bring up feelings of guilt. It was clear her mother was unhappy about her leaving to spend the whole summer with her dad, but there was no going back. Her belongings were in her dad's Dodge pickup, where he was waiting with the motor running.

"I love you, Mandy Lee Hawkins," her mother said, hugging her. "I can't believe you're almost thirteen. You look so pretty and grown up in your new jeans and sweater. Oh, Mandy, I'm going to miss you. You call me if you have any problems at your dad's place and I'll come and get you, understand?"

"Don't worry, Mom, there won't be any problems," Mandy said, "I love you too." Mandy was proud of her mother and thought she was cool-looking with her curly brown hair and nice figure. She remembered when her mom and dad had been

a good-looking couple together, but not anymore. Divorce had ended that.

Next she hugged her young brother, Alex. “Alex, from now on it’s your job to take the garbage cans out on Wednesdays. Don’t forget,” she said. “Look after Mom and let Skippy sleep on your bed. I’ll see you in July when you come for your visit with Dad. Okay?”

“Yeah, whatever,” he said. “And, Mandy Pandy, don’t you forget my birthday in June. I’m going to be ten.” In a playful way he reached up and gave a little yank on her pony tail.

“Don’t worry, I won’t forget.” She patted and kissed their Border collie Skippy on the nose. Then it happened. “Oh please no, please no, not now,” she whispered. She watched her mother walk straight to the truck where her dad was waiting. Even though she couldn’t hear exactly what they were saying, the tone was all too familiar. Why couldn’t they just say nice things to each other instead of arguing all the time? She felt the beginning of a sick ache in her stomach like she used to get when her folks argued. It was as if there was a wall between her mom and dad. They jabbed at each other with words that bounced back at them, and nothing ever got solved. Fortunately, it didn’t last long and her mother returned to the sidewalk.

After more quick hugs and kisses, Mandy and her dad drove away. She turned to look back at her mother standing under the maple tree in the front yard with her arm around Alex. They both looked sad waving to her. It wasn’t fun leaving them looking like that. With one last wave she turned forward in her seat and let the feel of a new adventure come over her. She was on her way. Even though she was not quite thirteen, she felt newly grown up inside. A big change in her life had just begun.

The idea to spend the whole summer with her dad had been hers. Two weeks was never enough. She had secretly worried about him. Mom had her and Alex, but Dad didn’t have anyone

close to him. Maybe if she was there longer he'd miss the family and want to get back with Mom. She'd have the summer to work on that one.

For a while there was silence as her dad made turns onto Monroe Street. After a few blocks he pulled into the parking lot of a drugstore and stopped the truck.

"Why are we stopping?" Mandy said. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing's wrong, something's right," he said, smiling. From under his seat he pulled a package and handed it to her. "Here, this is for you."

The package was a small box wrapped in white paper, which Mandy quickly tore open. As soon as she saw the picture on the outside of the box she said, "Oh Dad," and leaned over to give him a kiss on the cheek. "This is way cool, a brand-new cell phone! Thank you," she said over and over as she hugged the package to her cheek. "You don't know how much I've wanted one of these. This is the kind my friends have, with all the new apps. Oh, Dad, this is so awesome!"

"I heard your mother tell you to call her. Now you can call or text her and Alex whenever you want. But remember, don't spend all your time on that thing. You'll have lots of things to do at the ranch."

Knowing she could call her mother on her new cell phone erased all guilt feelings about leaving home. She was ready for summer with her dad.

As they drove west from Spokane on I-90, the silence between them was interrupted when Dad blurted out, "Okay, Mandy, let's have it."

"What do you mean? Let's have what?" she said, turning to stare at him.

"Why all of a sudden did you decide you wanted to stay with me for the whole summer? I'd like to know because I don't understand. Don't get me wrong, I couldn't be happier to have

you. I'm just curious about why you want to spend the whole summer with me instead of the usual two weeks. That's all."

Mandy sat speechless for a minute, looking straight ahead.

Dad looked over at her. "Is it because of some boy? Are you not getting along with your mother? Or is it something else? Which is it?"

Totally surprised by Dad's questions, Mandy took a quick look at him, her happy feelings starting to dim a little. *Oh no*, she thought to herself, *is this how it's going to be?*

"Mandy, I expect total honesty from you," he said. "When your mother and I divorced you were a little girl. You were nine. Now you're a young woman and things are different. I need to know why you decided to come for the whole summer. There has to be a reason. I'd like to know what it is."

Mandy, feeling and sounding defensive, looked right at her dad. "For sure it isn't because of any boy, and Mom and I almost always get along. So that's not it. I...I just had a feeling you might like to have me around for longer this time. I figured maybe you missed having Alex and me in your life and that you might like having one of us around for a little more than two weeks. So, I decided to come for the whole summer. That's all. And another thing, Dad, you need to know something I've never told you before. I really hate not having you in my life all the time. I get real lonesome for you and I miss you a lot."

With his eyes straight ahead on the road, her dad said absolutely nothing and gently placed his hand on her shoulder. Mandy watched a quiet look of pride spread over his face and the touch of a smile. He had the answer to his question. No other words or explanation were needed.

Dad let her listen to her favorite radio station and the time and miles went by quickly. They passed large fields of wheat and pastures with cattle and horses. He explained how important the wheat and apple crops were to the state of Washington. It

reminded her of when she was little and he'd talk like this at their Sunday picnics. He'd tell them about plants and trees and rocks and make nature sound interesting. She loved that about her dad.

Finally, he merged south on US 395, and it wasn't long before they came in view of the Columbia River.

"Dad, I'm getting hungry. Can we stop at McDonald's?"

"We will," he said, "just as soon as you take a good look at that river over there that's thousands of years old."

To Mandy it looked like a big, blue-colored ribbon winding along. She'd seen it many times before. So, it was the Columbia River. "I'm looking, I'm looking," she said.

"That river you're looking at provides food, transportation, recreation, and power for a whole lot of us folks around here. It's because of that river that I'm able to have a small piece of land and grow things and live the way I want and have you come for the summer," he said.

She knew he was saying important things even though it sounded boring after a while, but she listened and pretended to be interested.

"Thousands of people drive by or over this river every day and never really see it," he said, pointing toward the river. "Look, there's the Cable Bridge. We'll be going over it in few minutes. Get in the habit of using your eyes, Mandy. Learn not only to just see, but use your brown eyes to really observe things around you. Some day what you see could turn out to be very important. Okay, that's enough from me. Dads are supposed to remind and teach their kids...right?" he said. He turned to smile at her.

"Wow, Dad," Mandy said, "traveling with you is like watching Discovery Channel."

"You think so? In that case, it's time for a commercial break."

They did stop at McDonald's and while Mandy was munching on a French fry, her dad turned to her and said, "Mandy, before we get home there's something I've got to tell you first. It's important."

By the serious tone of his voice, Mandy wondered again, *What now?*

"Only," he said with a big grin on his face, "that there's a great, big, important surprise waiting for you the minute we get home."