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**More Fifth Grade Magic**

by Beatrice Gormley

Smashwords Edition

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Other e-books by Beatrice Gormley:

*Fifth Grade Magic*

*Richard and the Vratch*

*The Magic Mean Machine*

*Mail-Order Wings*

This book is dedicated to Mitzi, my oldest friend

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### 1. You Won't Believe Me

Amy had a plan. She stepped out of the cafeteria line and looked across the crowded lunch room, wondering if it was a good idea after all.

She had thought of it that morning, as soon as she had realized Kathy was out sick. Kathy was the girl who had glommed onto Amy when she moved to Rushfield a few months ago. But the most interesting girl in Amy's class, the girl Amy really wanted to get to know, was Gretchen.

Squinting toward the table where the girls in Mrs. Sheppard's class always sat, Amy saw that Gretchen was sitting in her usual place, near one end. And there was no one on that side of her. Good. If Kathy were here, she would make a fuss about Amy's sitting down next to Gretchen, but today maybe Amy could do it as if it were no big deal.

But suppose Gretchen acted unfriendly, the way she had been until last week, after the play . . .

Someone bumped into Amy from behind. "Make up your mind!"

Go, Amy told herself. Quickly she made what she called a "magic bargain": If you can get to that table without touching anybody, Gretchen will be friendly.

Amy began to weave her way among the noisy tables as if she were playing soccer with a tray in her hands. That boy was leaning way out from the bench . . . another boy flung an arm in Amy's path, and she dodged just in time . . . that girl was sticking her leg right in front of Amy, so she had to give a little hop at the last minute, and her fruit cup slopped into her tray.

But Amy had gotten through without touching anyone, and here she was—on the bench next to Gretchen.

Gretchen glanced at Amy's tray. "You didn't get any brownies."

"They must have run out," said Amy shyly. "I'm not really supposed to eat chocolate, anyway."

"Oh, come on," said Gretchen. She bent her brownie until it broke, and placed one half on Amy's tray. "Live a little!"

"So what happens if you do eat chocolate?" Beth leaned across Gretchen, toward Amy. "Do you get a bunch of pimples, just like regular kids who aren't models?"

Amy winced. She knew how Beth, and a lot of the kids in her class, felt about her—that she was conceited and standoffish because she was a professional model.

But Gretchen grinned in a friendly way. “Hey, wouldn’t it be funny if you just took one bite of that brownie and, *boing*, pimples popped out all over your face?”

In the middle of sipping her milk, Amy giggled and sputtered.

“Yeah,” said Beth without laughing. “That’d be the end of your great career.”

“You sound like my mother.” Amy sighed.

“Speaking of mothers,” said Gretchen, turning to Beth, “did you ask her if you could sign up for Young Theater?”

Beth nodded. “It’s okay.”

“What’s Young Theater?” Amy couldn’t help asking.

“It’s a Recreation Department program,” explained Gretchen. “For the summer. I’ve been in it every year. But this will be the best year, because they give the main parts to the fifth graders, since we’ll be too old for Young Theater next summer. You should sign up, too.”

“I think I could.” Amy tried to keep her tone casual. This was like a wish come true. A wish that she hadn’t even dared to make. “I’m going to the Delaware shore for two weeks with my father, but that isn’t until the end of the summer. Where do you sign up?”

“At the high school gym, on Saturday,” said Gretchen with a pleased expression. “Better get there early. Sometimes the good classes fill up.”

“Yeah, like the foursquare line, if we don’t hurry.” Popping the last bite of her sandwich into her mouth, Beth stood up. “I’m going to the rest room before there’s two million first graders in there.”

This was turning out so much better than Amy had even imagined. Now she had a chance to talk with Gretchen alone. There was something she very much wanted to ask her. She just hoped it wouldn’t make Gretchen mad and spoil everything. She took a deep breath. “Er—you know that time—that weird day, a while ago . . .?”

Gretchen’s freckled face stiffened, and she poked a crust on her plate. “What time?”

It had been *such* a weird day that it was hard for Amy to put into words what had happened. “You know. We changed places.” She shuddered, remembering the shock. First waking up in a strange bed, and then looking in the mirror to see Gretchen’s freckles and wavy ginger-colored hair. “You were me, and I was . . . you.”

“Yeah.” A long pause. “I’m sorry.” Gretchen squinted down her straw, as if she might find an excuse there for what she had done. “I should have asked you first, but I didn’t get a chance. If you really want to know, I thought you probably wouldn’t want to exchange.”

Amy leaned closer. “I’m not mad at you. I just wondered, how did you do it?”

“I didn’t, exactly.” Gretchen spoke slowly. “Someone else did.”

“Well, who was it?” Amy’s heart beat faster. At last Gretchen was going to let her in on her incredible secret.

“You won’t believe me, if I tell you.” Gretchen crushed the crust with her thumb. Her mouth worked, as if she was trying to say something that wouldn’t come out. Finally she gave a deep sigh. “It was my fairy godmother.”

Amy stared. Then she gave a disbelieving laugh. Was Gretchen making fun of her? She drew back.

“I knew you wouldn’t believe me,” said Gretchen. Her face was as red as a freckled tomato.

Amy didn’t know what to think. She was about to ask Gretchen what she meant by a fairy godmother when Beth plopped down on the bench across from them. “Boy, aren’t you through yet? We have to line up for foursquare.”

“Oh, yeah!” Gretchen jumped up, looking relieved. “Come on, Amy. You can eat the brownie on the playground.”

Walking home that afternoon, Amy was still wondering what Gretchen had meant. She couldn't believe that Gretchen was teasing her. Gretchen didn't seem like the kind of person who would make something up just to tease Amy. Gretchen said what she thought and didn't try to hide the way she felt—that had gotten her into trouble with the teacher a couple of times.

So if Gretchen had decided she liked Amy, why wouldn't she tell her how they had switched places? Amy couldn't figure it out. But she was sure of one thing: Gretchen wouldn't have shared her brownie with Amy if she didn't like her. Now that they were going to spend the whole summer together in Young Theater, who knows—they might get to be good friends.

*If* Mother would let her sign up. Amy glanced at her watch. It was 3:05. Usually it took Amy fifteen minutes to walk home, but if she ran, she could probably get there in ten minutes. If I get home by 3:15, she bargained with herself, Mother will let me sign up for Young Theater.

Amy had never really had a good friend, at least not for the last few years. Ever since Mother and Daddy had gotten divorced, she had moved around a lot. First to the city, then to a town near the city, and finally to Rushfield, where a lot of people were building houses and Mother thought there would be more “scope” for her interior design business.

Amy's side ached. She was used to running, but not with a heavy book bag. Still, she forced herself to run on, past all the white two-story houses with small-paned windows. The houses in this part of Rushfield had been built two hundred years ago, or looked as if they had.

Gasping as she stopped by her own mailbox, Amy glanced at her watch. Three twelve—she had made it. She put her hands on her knees for a moment, to catch her breath.

The house Amy's mother had bought was new, and looked it. The front of the house was blank rectangles of unpainted boards, and the second-story roof slanted off at an unexpected angle. “Oh, you live in that weird house on Mallard Street,” a girl had said to Amy when they first moved here.

Of course every time they moved, Amy had to start over at a new school with new kids. She never got to feel comfortable anywhere. It was as if she always had to wear the stiff, chemical-smelling new clothes she modeled and never got to put on her nice soft old sweat suit.

But now, thought Amy as she passed her mother's silver Audi in the garage, now things might be different. If she could take Young Theater with the other girls, she might actually get to feeling comfortable here. Let's see, if the sign-up was Saturday, and this was Tuesday, that would give her mother four days to plan.

Mother liked to know about things ahead of time and write them down on her calendar. If Amy asked her at the last minute if she could stay overnight with someone or if Mother would take Amy to the library to get a movie, Mother's eyebrows would draw together. “I need to have a little advance warning, angel. My schedule is so tight, between building up my business and running *your* career, to say nothing of keeping fit . . .”

In the high-ceilinged, gleaming white kitchen Amy set her book bag down on a counter. Water was running upstairs, so her mother must be taking a shower. Good. That would give Amy a chance to get ready before she talked to her.

Looking around the kitchen for something helpful to do, Amy discovered that the dishwasher was full of clean dishes. She put them away. Then she clattered up the circular iron staircase to her bedroom, unpinned her calendar from the wall, and sat down at her desk.

At the beginning of the year her mother had given her the calendar and urged her to write down all her appointments, but somehow Amy had never gotten around to it. In fact, the calendar looked so uninteresting that she had never even turned the pages past January.

“A Year’s Journey” was the title of the calendar. The first picture showed a girl in a long, old-fashioned dress, with little black shoes like ballet slippers peeping out from underneath her skirt. You couldn’t see the girl’s face, since she was turned sideways and the hood of her long cloak was pulled over her head. Carrying a basket on one arm, she was walking along a road that wound over hills and through valleys. “The Romantic style of the calendar makes a nice contrast with your Swedish modern furniture,” Mother had said.

“Tra-la, tra-la,” said Amy scornfully to the sweet and dainty-looking girl on the calendar. She would rather have had a cat calendar, but it was never any use saying anything.

Flipping the pages, Amy paused to look at the picture for March. It showed the same cloaked and hooded girl. But now the path led directly into a dark forest. The girl looked tiny, compared to the towering trees.

Amy felt a tingle of excitement. Somehow the picture made her think of that weird day in March when she had traded places with Gretchen.

Then Amy looked up from the calendar, aware that the sounds in the house had changed. Uh-oh. The running water had stopped, which meant her mother was out of the shower. Amy had better get on with writing down “commitments,” as her mother called them, on the calendar.

Quickly Amy turned the page to May—and paused again. Now the cloaked girl had come to a clearing deep in the forest. Huge branches arched over the space, shutting out most of the light, but Amy could make out tree trunks like pillars around a pool.

The person in the cloak looked different in this picture. Amy wasn’t sure what made the difference, but now she looked more mysterious than sweet or dainty.

Pulling her eyes away from the picture, Amy focused on the ruled-off dates below it. In the space for Saturday she wrote in pencil, *Go to high school gym. Sign up for Y.T.*

“Hello, angel.”

Amy turned to see her mother, her hair wrapped in a towel-turban, standing in the doorway. “Hi, Mother. I was just writing down my commitments on my calendar.”

An approving smile spread over Mrs. Sacher’s face. She crossed the room and sat on the edge of Amy’s desk. Amy smelled the scent of her mother’s shampoo and felt the brush of her silky dressing gown.

“Very good, Amy! I’m glad you’ve realized how important it is to use your calendar.” There was a pause, and then she asked, “What is this about Y.T. on Saturday?”

“Young Theater,” said Amy, trying to hold her breath and talk at the same time. “It’s a summer program. I have to sign up Saturday morning. Gret—” Amy remembered in time that her mother thought Gretchen was aggressive and uncontrolled. “The kids say the director is wonderful, and we’ll learn a lot about acting.”

Her mother nodded as if she wasn’t really listening. “That sounds like a nice thing to do, if you were going to stay in Rushfield this summer. But I have a thrilling surprise for you.” The corners of her mouth twitched with excitement. “Do you remember, this winter, I looked into a summer camp for you, a modeling camp? Camp KidShine. But then your father and I decided it was too expensive.”

Amy’s heart sank. “Yes.”

“But now my business is starting to take off—I may even get the chance to decorate the Trenton house, that fabulous contemporary. And your father is better off financially, too,

although he doesn't like to admit it. So I called the KidShine director this morning, and would you believe it, they just had a cancellation!" She beamed at her daughter. "So come June 29, you'll be off to the Catskills for six weeks."

## 2. I Need Magic

*Off to the Catskills for six weeks.* To Amy it sounded like a prison sentence. "But I wanted to stay here this summer. With the kids I know. We were going to have a good time."

"A good time!" Mrs. Sacher laughed indulgently. "I can't tell you how many *good times* I've given up to get my career on the fast track. That's the trade-off a professional person has to make."

Amy's mind darted this way and that, like a frantic chipmunk in the middle of the road. "Well, then, why do I have to go for the whole six weeks?" she asked. "Maybe I could be in Young Theater half the summer and go to camp for the other half."

Under the towel-turban, Mrs. Sacher's brows drew together. "Angel, do you understand what an opportunity this is? You'll be learning techniques from top professional models, working with top fashion photographers. This modeling for catalogs you've been doing is all right to start with, but there's a lot more than that in your future."

"Maybe I won't get in," suggested Amy in desperation. "They have to choose you, don't they?"

"They admitted you last winter," said her mother. "I didn't tell you then, because I thought you couldn't go anyway, but the director liked your portfolio."

Amy looked up into her mother's glowing face and tried to think about how thrilling it was. But all she could think of was Gretchen and Beth at Young Theater together, comfortable and chummy.

"Now, let's get back to your calendar," Mrs. Sacher went on. "You know, it may be hard to believe, but it's true: If you'll just write things down on your calendar, you can actually take control of your life."

You mean, *you* can take control of my life, thought Amy with anger that surprised her. I ran all the way home for nothing. I put away the dishes for nothing.

"First of all, erase that entry for Saturday, since you won't be signing up for the theater program." As Amy slowly picked up her pencil and erased what she had written, her mother added, "Saturday might be a good time to shop for your camp clothes."

Amy said nothing, staring down at the picture on her calendar. The cloaked girl knelt on the far side of the pool, facing Amy but with her head bowed so that the hood fell over her face. Her spread hands, palms up, seemed to offer the dark, still pool to Amy like a crystal ball.

I know what my future is, thank you, Amy thought. And I hate it.

Slipping from Amy's desk, Mrs. Sacher said, "I'd better go dry my hair, but I couldn't wait to tell you the good news. Be sure to write down your appointment with the photographer tomorrow, angel," she added from the doorway. "That's at four o'clock."

Anger seethed to the top of Amy's head like soda spurting out of a shaken-up can. As soon as her mother was gone, Amy grabbed a purple felt pen from her pencil holder. She scrawled in the space for tomorrow, *Wednesday: Mother's little angel to photographer.*

Writing the last word slowed Amy down, and she giggled nervously. But she didn't erase the purple scrawl.

Glancing at the calendar picture again, Amy noticed that the glassy surface of the pool seemed to quiver, as if something had dropped into it. Strange, the way some pictures looked like they were moving.

Amy sighed and put down the pen. If only . . . If only, what? It was hard even to imagine what wonderful thing might happen so that she could take Young Theater after all. What *impossible* thing. Anything Amy could think of that would keep her from going to camp, like breaking a leg, would keep her from going to the theater program, too.

Something impossible, thought Amy. That's what I need.

A funny feeling came over her, as if the world had turned upside down for a moment. On one weird day, she remembered, something impossible *had* happened. That day she found herself in Gretchen's body.

"It was my fairy godmother," Gretchen had said.

What happened that day wasn't like Amy's magic bargain that if she didn't touch anyone in the cafeteria, Gretchen would be friendly. No—on that day in March, there had been *real* magic at work.

Her lungs filling with a frightening hope, Amy jumped up from her desk and hurried downstairs to the phone in the kitchen.

Gretchen answered right away. "Hello."

"Hi, it's Amy."

"Oh, hi."

"Hi." Amy paused, biting her lip. She didn't know exactly what to say.

"Well, hi-hi-hi!" Gretchen laughed. "Amy, what did you call me up for?"

"Um . . . remember what you told me at lunch?"

"You mean about Young Theater?"

"Um . . . no." Amy felt her face growing warm, and she dropped her voice. "About the—about your fairy godmother."

There was a silence, during which Amy wondered if she had gone crazy and imagined the whole thing. Then Gretchen said in a guarded tone, "Yeah?"

Amy's breath grew shallow, making it harder to talk. "I just wanted to ask you, that was a joke, right? About your—um—f.g. making things happen?"

"Why are you asking me again?" Gretchen sounded suspicious. "If I was going to make up a story, I'd make up a better one than that. Like aliens from a U.F.O., or a crazy scientist with a weird invention."

"I guess so," said Amy. She paused, then blurted out, "How did you find her?"

"Why do you want to know?" Now Gretchen sounded alarmed. "I hope you don't think it would be a good idea to call for *your* f.g. and make some wishes, because it would *not*! Don't you remember what an awful fix we got into?"

Amy remembered some embarrassing things, all right, like screaming at Gretchen to get out of her body, and like Mrs. Sheppard hauling her off to the principal. But the main thing she remembered was how exciting it had been. That day was something Amy's mother had not written down on her calendar. "Yes, but didn't it turn out all right for you, in the end?" In a choked whisper she added, "I need magic."

"No, you don't!" Gretchen sighed loudly. "Believe me,, magic just gets you in a terrible mess, and I'm not going to tell you how to do it, so stop asking me."

Gretchen was going to hang up. Amy squeezed the receiver in both hands, as if she could keep her on the phone that way. "But can't you just tell me how your f.g.—"

“Don’t tie up the phone, angel.” Mrs. Sacher appeared at the end of the counter, her hair now dry and perfectly styled. “I need to make some business calls.”

Amy said good-bye and hung up, her eyes smarting with forced-back tears. How could Gretchen be that mean?

Opening her business notebook, her mother took over the stool by the phone. “Who were you talking to, angel? And what does f.g. mean?”

It means mind your own business, thought Amy. Aloud she muttered, “Just a girl from school. She’s the one who kept saying f.g. I guess it’s a swearword.”

Mrs. Sacher looked mystified, but her attention was on the number she was tapping into the phone. “Oh. You don’t want to hang around with girls who use vulgar language. Go get your sweat suit on, and we’ll go running right after I make these calls.”

That evening Amy had a headache. “Like a steel band squeezing your head?” asked her mother sympathetically. She held out a Tylenol pill and a glass of water.

“Not exactly.” Amy tried to think what it was like. “More like something trying to pop *out*, all around my head.” Seeing the horror on her mother’s face, she realized that sounded like pimples. She added quickly, “I guess it is like a steel band.”

“*Pop out?*” Mrs. Sacher brushed back Amy’s bangs and peered at her face. “I don’t see any spots.” Then she drew back, her eyes narrowing. “I think maybe you have a guilty conscience. Tell Mother the truth—have you been eating chocolate? *The day before a modeling appointment?*”

Then Amy had to listen to a lecture she had heard before, the one about how nothing was more important than taking care of her skin, and how the enjoyment of eating chocolate only lasted a few moments, but the satisfaction of a successful career lasted a lifetime. If her mother lost her voice, Amy could give the lecture to herself.

Going off to bed at last, Amy wondered if one little half-brownie could have made her head feel so funny. After all, when she ate chocolate at Daddy’s nothing bad ever happened to her skin.

In the middle of the night Amy half woke up. There’s a light on, she thought groggily.

She squinted at the lamp across the room on her desk, at the track lights on the ceiling. They were all dark. And yet, a faint glow was coming from somewhere.

Who cares, thought Amy as she pulled up the covers and drifted back into sleep. It’s not my problem.

Across the room, the dark pool in the calendar picture reflected an eerie light.

When Amy got up the next morning, she thought she heard a faint humming, like the sound her desk lamp made. But she wasn’t sitting at her desk, and besides, the lamp was off. Probably her ears were still clogged from the cold she’d had last week.

In the bathroom Amy picked up the washcloth and looked into the mirror. She frowned and blinked. There must be something wrong with the lights around the mirror, because it looked as if a ring of light was shining from her head. With a laugh at that idea, Amy switched off the bathroom lights.

But light still seemed to be shining out of her head. In fact, it was clearer now that the bathroom lights were off. The light formed a flat circle, like one of the rings of Saturn.

Was something going wrong with her eyes? Amy glanced anxiously around the bathroom. But the scale on the floor, the bright pattern on the shower curtain, and her toothbrush hanging from the toothbrush holder all looked normal.

Amy gave another laugh, a nervous one, and rubbed her scalp hard. *There*—when she pressed on a place where the circle of golden light met her head, that turned it off. But now it made a buzzing noise, and her hand tingled.

Amy took her hand away from her head. The circle of light popped out again.

A rap on the bathroom door made Amy jump. “Angel,” called her mother’s voice, “I want to say something to you.”

### 3. A Minor Defect

Amy glanced at the mirror again, at her open mouth and staring eyes, and especially at the disk of light shimmering around her blonde head. She couldn’t let Mother see her looking like a planet with a ring around it—she would have a fit.

Grabbing a towel from the rack, Amy wrapped it into a turban, the way her mother did when she got out of the shower. Then she opened the door.

“Oh, you did take a shower. I didn’t hear the water running.” Mrs. Sacher didn’t seem to notice anything strange. “I was just going to remind you to wash your hair, since you’re seeing the photographer this afternoon.”

“I remembered,” said Amy, feeling a twinge of guilt.

“Yes, because you wrote it down on your calendar,” said her mother. “I knew that would help, angel.”

Back in her room, Amy stared into the full-length mirror on the door, letting the towel drop to her shoulders. The ring of light shone out around her head.

Seized with a fit of giggles, she pressed her hand to her mouth. What’s so funny? she scolded herself. You’d better get dressed.

And she couldn’t wear a towel on her head to school. Maybe her headband . . . Yes, if she pulled the headband exactly over the . . . the *thing*, it shut off. It made the humming turn into a buzz, but she would just have to put up with that.

After getting dressed, Amy went downstairs for breakfast. In the kitchen her mother was sitting at the counter, drinking coffee and reading the business section of the paper. She looked up and smiled as she saw Amy, but the smile quickly turned into a frown. “You aren’t planning to wear *that* today, I hope.”

Amy looked down at her belted jump suit in astonishment. “Why not? This is what you laid out for me to wear.”

“Not the jump suit.” Her mother made an impatient gesture. “That grubby old headband. Remember, you’re going to the photographer right after school.”

Putting both hands on the headband, as if her mother might rip it off, Amy tried to think of an argument. “What does it matter what I wear to the photographer? I have to change when I get there, anyway.”

Mrs. Sacher shook her head and sighed. “Angel, I thought you understood, by now, how important it is to make a good impression on everyone you work with. You can’t afford to show up at the photographer’s looking half put-together.”

“All right, all right.” Amy ran back up the stairs to her room. She didn’t know what she was going to do when she got there, but it was easier to think away from her mother.

Maybe there was something else she could wear on her head, something better than a headband. . . . Something like . . . that floppy felt hat Mother had bought for her last audition! It was the same color as her jump suit!

Amy took the hat from her closet and settled it on her head. There. It shut off the light, and it looked put-together—at least, Amy thought so.

When she came downstairs the second time, Mrs. Sacher nodded and smiled. “Very nice choice! But do you think you should wear a hat to school? I could bring it along when I pick you up this afternoon. Don’t they have a rule against wearing hats in class?”

“I’m not sure,” said Amy, although she *was* pretty sure there was a rule like that. She pulled the brim of the hat more firmly over her forehead, ignoring the buzzing noise. “I really want to wear it today. Maybe Mrs. Sheppard won’t say anything.”

Mrs. Sacher laughed knowingly. “She has a soft spot for you, doesn’t she? Well, of course she does—my angel’s so pretty and sweet.”

By the time she got to school, Amy wished that she had taken the time to do something (but what?) about the ring of light around her head. It didn’t seem to like being kept down by the hat, and it buzzed against her skull.

In the classroom Amy saw the heads turning toward and her felt hat, but she ignored them and sat down in her seat next to Kathy.

“What a great hat,” said Kathy. “Is that the one you wore for your last audition?”

Amy nodded. “I’m going to a photographer after school today.” She didn’t say that was why she was wearing the hat, but she would let Kathy think that.

“Guess what I did yesterday when I was home sick?” Kathy pulled a piece of lined paper from her current events folder. “I made a list of all the celebrities I know. I know seven!”

“Really?” To Amy, Kathy’s voice seemed to add to the buzzing around her head, but she took the list politely. Kathy had stuck gold and red stars around the top of the paper. “Are you sure they’re all famous? I never heard of Manny Olsen.”

“Okay, I’ll explain.” Kathy leaned over and pointed. “Manny Olsen is my second cousin—he was on a game show. And—”

“Wait a minute. You put *me* on the list!” Amy had spotted her own name, with gold stars before and after it. “I’m not a celebrity.”

“Your picture was in the paper, wasn’t it? Uh-oh.” Kathy glanced toward the teacher out of the corner of her eye. “I’d better put my list away.”

But Amy had already noticed the way Mrs. Sheppard was pushing up her pink-lensed glasses at her, and she didn’t think the teacher’s frown was for the paper Kathy slid back in her folder. Sure enough, Mrs. Sheppard got up from her desk, walked over, and bent down to whisper to Amy. “Don’t you think you’d be more comfortable if you hung your hat in the closet, dear?”

“Oh, I can’t,” said Amy. Gazing with wide eyes from under the brim, she held on to it with both hands. “Please, Mrs. Sheppard, Can’t I wear it? Just today?”

“Amy needs her hat for modeling.” Kathy spoke up importantly. “She’s going to the photographer’s after school.”

The teacher straightened, looking undecided. She fingered one of her large pearly earrings. “But I don’t see why . . .”

A swell of laughter on the other side of the classroom made Mrs. Sheppard turn to look. Dennis Boyd, the class clown, was sitting at his desk with his hands folded, looking straight ahead. He was wearing his Red Sox cap.

“Dennis,” said Mrs. Sheppard sharply. “I thought you understood from our talk yesterday morning that we don’t wear . . .” She looked back at Amy in her floppy felt hat.

“I thought today must be National Hat Day.” Dennis gave the teacher one of his fake-angelic smiles. His friends laughed.

Mrs. Sheppard’s frown deepened, and Amy was sure the teacher was going to make them both take off their hats. She thought of what her mother often told her clients: “A new light fixture can transform a room.” Room 5A would be transformed, all right.

But Mrs. Sheppard only pressed her lips together and went back to her attendance book.

Kathy nudged Amy and smirked, as if to say, “She’ll do anything you want.” Amy looked away.

“Teacher’s pet wins again.” That was Beth’s loud whisper from the back of the room.

Amy wanted to shout to the whole class: “Do you think I like being a teacher’s pet?” But of course that was just what they did think.

During reading groups, when the teacher’s back was turned, Dennis sneaked up to the chalkboard and drew a heart and wrote *Mrs. S. + Amy* in it. As soon as the kids started laughing, Mrs. Sheppard turned around and made Dennis erase it. But Amy wondered if one of those unfriendly snickers was Gretchen’s.

What was almost worse, at lunch Kathy blabbed to everyone that Amy was modeling this afternoon. Several kids wanted to know what it was like, and if she made a lot of money, and if she was going to be in a movie pretty soon. All the questions seemed to buzz around Amy, the way the hidden shining circle buzzed against her head, until she wanted to scream.

The only good thing that happened that day was the note, a piece of lined paper folded and taped shut, that Amy found on her desk after recess.

AMY—PRIVATE!!! was printed on the outside. Amy was afraid it might be a mean note about her being a teacher’s pet. But the bold, forward-slanting writing inside said, *I’m sorry I yelled at you yesterday. Don’t be mad! F.G.’s are bad news and I know what I’m talking about. G.N.*

Noticing Kathy craning her neck to read the note, Amy folded it up and slipped it into her pocket.

When three o’clock came, Amy was glad to run out of school and jump into her mother’s waiting Audi.

“Off to work we go!” Mrs. Sacher was in good spirits.

Amy fastened her seat belt and sank back with a sigh. But then the thought of where they were going made her jerk upright. Wait a minute! she thought. I must be crazy. When I get to the photographer’s, they’ll make me take off the hat.

Glancing at her mother from the corner of her eye, Amy said brightly, “I just love this hat you bought me. I should get some more use out of it, since it cost so much. I sure hope the photographer will let me wear it today.”

Through her sunglasses Mrs. Sacher gave Amy a puzzled frown. “You weren’t paying attention, angel. This is a Christmas toy catalog, and you’re supposed to wear winter play clothes, remember? I brought a ski hat for you.”

“Oh, that’s right,” said Amy. She leaned back in her seat, as if she could slow the car down. Maybe the ring of light would just disappear any minute, the way it had come. If I bite my tongue the whole way, she bargained with herself, the light will turn off. But the light kept on buzzing under her hat, like a trapped fly.

“Headache all gone?” asked her mother.

Amy hesitated. As a matter of fact, her head didn’t feel too wonderful after being buzzed all day. Maybe she should try to get out of modeling by playing sick.

But no—if Mother thought Amy was sick, she would be sure to take her hat off to feel her forehead. “Un-huh,” she said, still holding her tongue firmly with her teeth. No, her best hope was to go to the photo session. Maybe she could whip off her felt hat and jam on the ski hat before anyone noticed her light fixture.

The photographer, a bearded man, opened the door of his studio. “Sacher, right?” He glanced at a schedule on his desk, then nodded toward a screen in the corner. “You can change back there.”

Behind the screen, Amy watched closely as her mother pulled a turtleneck jersey and bibbed ski pants out of the bag. Amy grabbed a snowflake-pattern ski hat by its pompom, murmuring, “I’ll just put this on first.”

“What?” Mrs. Sacher put one hand on her hip. “Don’t start fooling around now. Take off your hat and jump suit and put on the jersey.”

Oh, no. Grabbing the brim of her hat with both hands, Amy looked around the cubicle wildly for a way to escape. “I can’t.”

“Come on, angel. You’re a professional, so start acting like one.” Mrs. Sacher reached out to take the hat.

Amy backed up, but there was nowhere to back. Leaning away from her mother’s hands, she stumbled against the screen—and kept going.

There was a resounding crash. Her mother screamed. Amy lay flat on top of the screen, with the breath knocked out of her.

“Hey, watch that, there!” The photographer, adjusting some lights on poles, looked annoyed. “You could have knocked over a camera.”

“A camera!” exclaimed Mrs. Sacher angrily, bending over her daughter. “Angel, are you all right?”

“I . . . think so,” gasped Amy, putting her hands to her head. But she already knew, because the buzzing had stopped, that her hat must have fallen off.

Her mother’s expression of alarm changed to puzzlement. Still staring down at Amy, she blinked her eyes the way Amy had when she’d looked in the mirror this morning. Somehow the sight of her mother looking so baffled struck Amy funny, and she started giggling.

“I’m all set here,” said the photographer, picking up the fallen screen. “There’s another appointment scheduled for five, so if you’ll just get your kid to turn off her halo, and get her into the winter clothes. . . .”

Turn off her halo! That struck Amy even funnier. She tried to get up, but she was laughing too hard.

“Amy Renata Sacher,” said her mother in a dangerous voice. “Where did you get that thing?” She yanked Amy to her feet, seized her head in both hands, and peered at her hair. Like a mother monkey, thought Amy, trying to choke back her giggles.

In a rising tone Mrs. Sacher went on, “Did that Gretchen Nichols have anything to do with this? How do you get it off?”

The photographer peered over her shoulder. “Amazing, what they can do with miniaturization. I can’t even see the wires for the light.” He added briskly, “But let’s go—we should have started working five minutes ago.”

“Ow!” Amy tried to pull away from her mother, who was pawing frantically through her hair. “Don’t! It doesn’t come off.”

“Hey, can we stop fooling around here?” Now the photographer looked annoyed. “The modeling agency told me this kid was very cooperative. Are we going to shoot pictures, or what?”

Letting go of Amy, Mrs. Sacher swallowed and licked her lips. “Well. Nobody expected this, but I think the obvious thing is just to go on with the session. Amy, let’s pop your winter clothes on, and—”

“Go on with the session!” The photographer laughed disbelievingly. “With a halo on her head?”

“Why not?” said Mrs. Sacher. “It’s a Christmas catalog, isn’t it?”

“You must have lost it, lady. Playtime Toys told me straight shots, no gimmicks.”

Mrs. Sacher’s mouth twitched in a smile. “All right, but it’s really only a minor defect. You could airbrush it out.”

He laughed again, not in a nice way. “I’ve seen pushy mothers, but you really win the prize. Airbrush it! You think I’m going to do all that extra work because your kid insists on wearing her halo? That’s your problem.” He stepped to his desk and picked up the phone.

“What are you doing?” Mrs. Sacher grabbed his arm.

But he shook her off. “I’m calling the agency to tell them to send another model.”

Mrs. Sacher tried to argue some more, but it was no use. She and Amy had to stuff the winter clothes back in the bag and leave the studio. Amy wasn’t laughing anymore—she knew that when her mother got that upset, life was not going to be very pleasant for Amy. There was only one good thing: Now that the hat was off, the buzzing against her head wasn’t bothering her.

They rode home in terrible silence. Once or twice Amy started to say, “Really, it wasn’t my idea” or “It just happened overnight.” But then she shut her mouth. Feeble excuses would only make Mother more angry.

When they were in the house, Amy expected her mother to examine her head again, but Mrs. Sacher went straight for the phone. “First thing is to sweet-talk the agency,” she said grimly. Then, after someone spoke on the other end of the line, her voice turned bright and businesslike. “I called to apologize for the mix-up this afternoon. You see, Amy was victimized by some problem children at school.”

Amy knew her mother was just making up an excuse to tell the modeling agency, but she wondered. *Had* one of the kids at school done this to her? With a voodoo doll or something? Amy knew kids who would enjoy playing a mean trick on her, but she didn’t think this was the right kind of trick for them. They would be more likely to give her a potato for a nose.

“And so when we arrived at the photographer’s,” Mrs. Sacher went on, “she had lights on her scalp.” She paused to listen. Then she said sharply, “No. Not lice. Lights. L-i-g-h-t-s.”

Amy didn’t especially want to stick around, because it seemed that her mother would be madder than ever by the time she got off the phone. But when she tried to slip away, her mother frowned and pointed to the kitchen floor, as if to say, “*Stay.*”

After she finished explaining to the agency, Mrs. Sacher called a doctor who treated diseases of the scalp. This time she didn’t mention the lights. She scribbled on a note pad, said, “Fine. Tomorrow at ten o’clock,” and hung up. She turned to Amy.

Amy was used to her mother's gazing at her with satisfied admiration, as though she were looking in a mirror, but now Mrs. Sacher looked past Amy's shoulder as she spoke. "All right. Put this on your calendar: tomorrow at ten, to dermatologist. You'll just have to miss school—this is much more important."

Glad to escape to her room, Amy hurried up the stairs. She unpinned her calendar from the wall and put one knee on her desk chair. Let's see, tomorrow was Thursday.

Running along the rows of squares, her gaze came to a halt on today's date. There in the square for Wednesday, May 11, was her purple scrawl: *Mother's little angel to photographer.* Angel. Halo. *Oh.*

Amy's mouth dropped open. She put a hand up to the humming circle on her head. She shifted her gaze to the picture on the calendar.

There was the hooded figure, still kneeling beside the dark pool in the forest. Under the surface of the mysterious pool glimmered a flat golden circle.