

Wish on All the Stars

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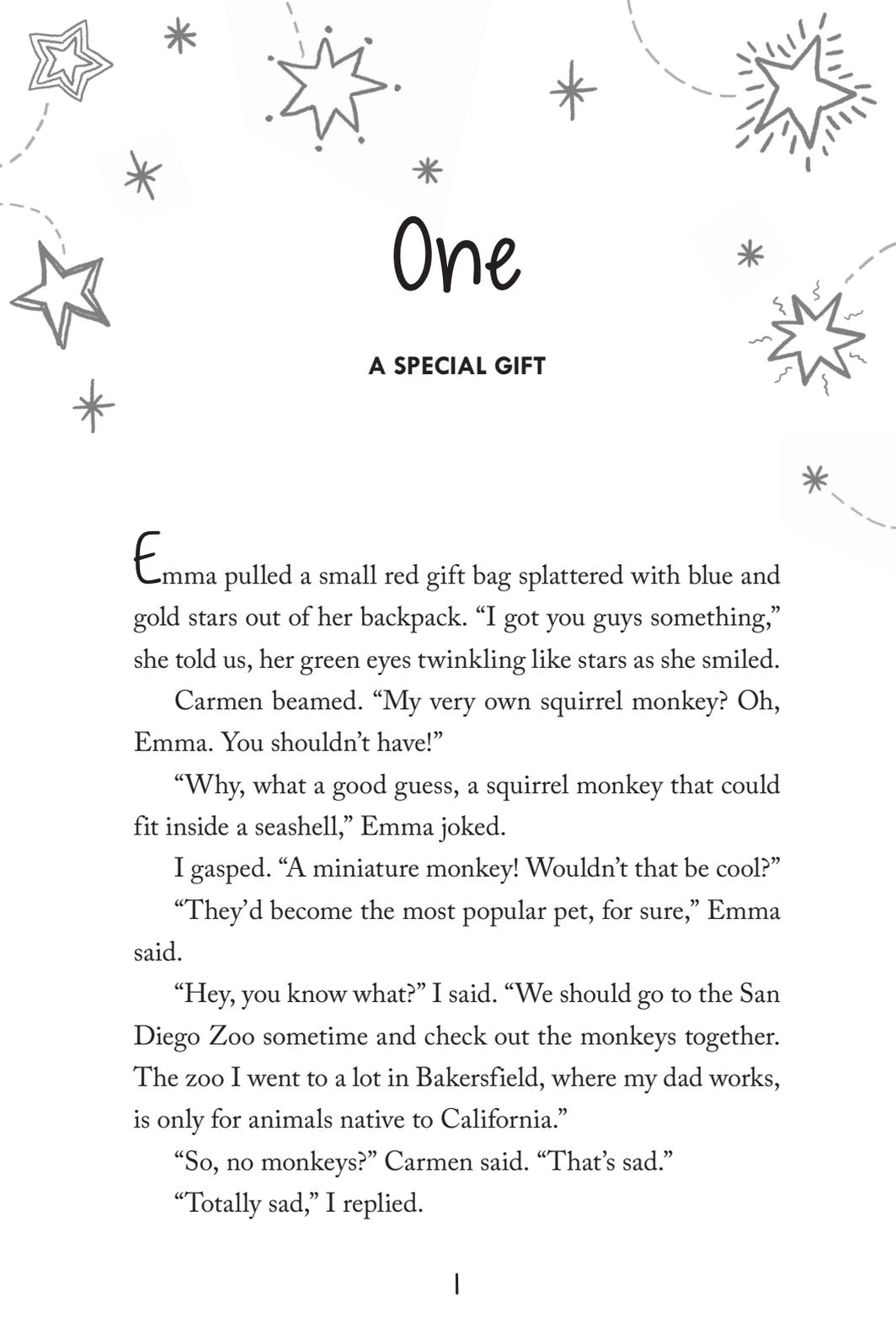
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One

A SPECIAL GIFT

Emma pulled a small red gift bag splattered with blue and gold stars out of her backpack. “I got you guys something,” she told us, her green eyes twinkling like stars as she smiled.

Carmen beamed. “My very own squirrel monkey? Oh, Emma. You shouldn’t have!”

“Why, what a good guess, a squirrel monkey that could fit inside a seashell,” Emma joked.

I gasped. “A miniature monkey! Wouldn’t that be cool?”

“They’d become the most popular pet, for sure,” Emma said.

“Hey, you know what?” I said. “We should go to the San Diego Zoo sometime and check out the monkeys together. The zoo I went to a lot in Bakersfield, where my dad works, is only for animals native to California.”

“So, no monkeys?” Carmen said. “That’s sad.”

“Totally sad,” I replied.

“But now that we’ve been talking about it,” Carmen said, “I don’t want to just visit monkeys, I want my very own to take home.”

Emma held out her hands like a referee. “Okay, guys, sorry to tell you, but I didn’t get you tiny squirrel monkeys. Any other guesses?”

I stared at the bag, wondering what it could be. We’d quickly eaten our lunches and then asked for passes to the library so we could have our first official meeting of the Starry Beach Club. Just five days before, we’d finally met Carmen, the girl who’d responded to my letter after Emma and I tossed bottles containing secret messages into the sea. My bottle apparently washed ashore as soon as we left, and Carmen, who’d been building a sand castle with her brother, couldn’t resist. She’d grabbed the bottle, read the letter, then sent me an email that said, among other things, *Do you really want to be a part of something special? Because I have an idea. I wish on stars all the time. I bet you do, too. And I was thinking about all the other people like us. Sometimes their wishes come true, but sometimes they don’t. Maybe the stars need helpers now and then. So let’s help. Maybe we could call ourselves the Starry Beach Club . . .*

She’d told me to find someone’s wish and make it come true, then signed her email as “Some Kid at the Beach.” Finding a good wish and making it come true wasn’t as easy as it might sound. But finally, Emma and I made something wonderful happen for our kind old neighbor, Mr. Dooney.

Now, with Carmen's help, it was time to move on to our next wish-granting project: saving our town's bookmobile.

"Okay, here's a guess," I said. "You found a nice, big parking space for the bookmobile."

Carmen chimed in. "One with a beautiful view of the ocean for Mr. and Mrs. Button."

"Mrs. Button can write in her notebook of beautiful things," I continued, "while watching the magical surf hit the sand."

Emma stuck her bottom lip out for a second before she replied, "If only."

The bookmobile, along with the people who ran it, Mr. and Mrs. Button, had become one of the best parts about moving to Mission Beach from my hometown of Bakersfield. But last week we'd learned that the new manager of the grocery store where the Buttons parked the bookmobile wouldn't allow them to stay for free anymore. They'd have to start paying rent or leave.

I gave Emma's arm a squeeze. "Sorry. Didn't mean to make you feel bad. Can we just open the gift, please? I'm dying to know!"

She reached into the bag and pulled out three little boxes wrapped in baby-blue tissue paper. "One for you, Juliet," she said, pushing one toward me. "One for you, Carmen. And one for me."

"I love that you wrapped one for yourself, even though you know what it is," Carmen said.

“Would’ve ruined the surprise if I didn’t,” she said. “Okay, on the count of three, let’s open them. One. Two. Three.”

I carefully tore the tissue paper while Carmen and Emma ripped theirs open like little kids on Christmas morning.

“Oh, Emma, it’s so cute,” Carmen squealed. I stayed focused on my own box so I wouldn’t have the surprise ruined.

“I’m so glad you like it, even if it’s not a miniature squirrel monkey. Meanwhile, I guess Juliet’s going to save the three inches of paper and reuse it,” Emma teased.

I opened my box. Inside was a teensy-tiny bottle with a note rolled up inside it. I picked up the bottle and saw that it hung on a pretty silver chain. “Oh my gosh,” I said. “It’s perfect! Where’d you find these?”

“Molly helped me order them from Etsy,” she said. “It’s a website where people sell things they’ve made. In case you were wondering why I kept putting off our first official meeting, this is why. I wanted to wait until they came in the mail.”

As we all went to work attaching them around our necks, I asked, “Did you write us notes on the tiny pieces of paper using your best tiny handwriting?”

“No, but you can pretend I did,” she replied.

“What would you have written?” Carmen asked.

“Um . . .” She thought for a moment. “I would have said,

‘Always remember, wishes do come true.’” Then, in almost a whisper, because we were in the library after all, she started singing, “*When you wish upon a star . . .*”

I joined in, quietly, on the next line.

“Is that from a movie?” Carmen asked.

Emma often broke into song during conversations and I was totally used to it by now. Even loved it, actually. Carmen, however, still seemed a little surprised by it.

“Yes,” I said. “*Pinocchio*. I think. Is that right, Emma?”

“That would be correct,” she replied.

“Oh, okay,” Carmen said. “I don’t think I’ve seen that one.”

“It’s really good,” Emma said. “Your little brother would probably like it. And you, too, of course. I have the DVD at home if you want to borrow it. Our family loves movies, especially Disney ones. Does your family watch movies very often?”

She shrugged. “Yeah. I guess. Anyway, are we going to get to our official business? If we don’t hurry, the bell’s gonna ring.”

This was what usually happened when we asked Carmen something about her family—she changed the subject. She was so different from how Emma had been when I’d first met her. Emma and I had hit it off right away. And when she’d introduced me to her big family and shown me their cute ice cream shop, the Frozen Spoon, I’d liked her even more. I definitely liked Carmen, too, but I was still

getting to know her, and it seemed like there was a lot I didn't know.

I thought of my own family situation and how, at first, I hadn't wanted to tell Emma that my parents were separated. Maybe Carmen had something she was nervous about telling us. Maybe she just needed a little more time to get to know us and to see that we would never say or do anything to hurt her. All I knew was that I really wanted to prove to her she could trust me.