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UPSIDE ★ DOWN MAGIC

HIDE AND SEEK



New school.
New trouble.

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UPSIDE★DOWN MAGIC

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by

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and

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*Dedicated to the amazing young actors of the
Upside-Down Magic movie:
Izabela Rose, Siena Agudong, Alison Fernandez,
Elie Samouhi, Max Torina, and Yasmeen Fletcher*



1

Nory was preparing to take a Big Test.
The Big Test, for the second time.
The first time had been a disaster.

Nory was in fifth grade. She liked sugary breakfast cereal. She wore bright clothes. She had big hair, brown skin, and a terrible singing voice. She was outspoken, but it was easy to hurt her feelings. Her magic talent was fluxing and her full name was Elinor Boxwood Horace.

Back in the summer before fifth grade, Nory's magic powers had bubbled up. All kids got their

powers around age ten. Then they went to magic school.

In magic school, just like in ordinary school, you had to read and write and do science projects—but you also studied magic. The type of magic you studied depended on your talent. Everyone was labeled as one of the five Fs:

Flyers could fly or make things fly.

Flares had fire or heating magic.

Flickers could turn invisible or make other things invisible.

Fuzzies had animal magic and could communicate with animals. They might command a flock of geese or befriend a rhinoceros.

And Fluxers could turn themselves into animals. But not *all* animals. Not right away. Beginner Fluxers started by turning themselves into kittens. Then they learned to shift into puppies, hamsters, and other small domestic mammals before studying how to flux into large ones. Then they learned wild

ones. And tricky ones. Non-mammals like fish, insects, and birds were especially hard.

Nory could actually do some large creatures already. Also, she had fluxed into two different fish, one insect, and a bluebird. Problem was, she didn't keep them in the right shape. Nory had upside-down magic.

That could have been no big deal in another family, but Nory's father was the headmaster of a very fancy private magic school called Sage Academy. It only admitted the students with the strongest magic. The strongest, most conventional magic.

Nory's sister, Dalia, went to Sage.

Nory's brother, Hawthorn, went to Sage.

And Nory had always been expected to go to Sage as well.

But on the day of the Big Test, she couldn't flux "properly." She jumbled up her animals. She added snake to her kitten to become a snitten. Then she added dragon to her kitten to become a dritten.

Even worse, Nory tended to lose track of her human mind when she fluxed. During the first Big Test, she had breathed fire at people. And she had almost eaten a unicorn.

Nory had been denied admission to Sage Academy. It had been the worst day ever.

After that, Father had sent Nory to live in the town of Dunwiddle with Aunt Margo, Nory's mother's sister. (Nory's mother had died when Nory was very young.) The public school near Aunt Margo had a trial program just starting up, for kids with upside-down magic. Nory went there for fifth grade, instead of going to Sage.

It had turned out great. There'd been a few bumps here and there, sure, but Aunt Margo was fun to live with. She was nowhere near as strict as Father. She ordered pizza in for dinner almost every night and let Nory eat sugary breakfast cereal out of the box. She was a flyer who ran her own flying taxi service.

Right away, Nory had made a best friend. His

name was Elliott Cohen, and he was an Upside-Down Flare. Elliott could flare just a tiny bit and also had ice powers.

A bit later, Nory had made *another* best friend, Pepper Phan. Pepper was an Upside-Down Fuzzy, which meant that animals didn't love her the way they loved typical Fuzzies. Instead, they ran away from Pepper in terror.

Nory adored her teacher, Ms. Starr, and liked the other kids in her class. There were eight students total in Upside-Down Magic, and as a rule, they stood up for one another. Sometimes the typical kids were mean, especially a Flare named Lacey Clench. But overall, Nory was happy at Dunwiddle.

And then Father had come along, tra la la, and said, "Oh, hey, here's a fun idea! Remember that test you failed, Nory? Why don't you take it again?!"

But not in those words.

Last night, Father had driven two hours to the town of Dunwiddle. Over cups of tea, he had explained

to Nory and Aunt Margo that one of the Sage fifth graders was moving to Australia. There would be an opening in the fifth grade, starting in January.

Father wanted Nory to apply.

Well, *re*apply.

Now that Nory's magic was under better control, and since she'd had a great report card, he thought she could get in.

Father usually got what he wanted. He expected his children to be obedient, and he believed he knew what was best for them. Nory wasn't sure she wanted to go to Sage Academy, but he was so bossy. She let him drive her home without protesting.

She slept in her old bed, which felt cozy but also too small. She got up in the morning and put on a dress.

She squashed her hair into two neat braids.

She ate blueberries, whole wheat toast, and a soft-boiled egg for breakfast.

It was like nothing had changed—even though *everything* had changed. She wasn't the same Nory as

she had been before Ms. Starr's Upside-Down Magic class. But here she was, back in her same old life.

She washed her dishes. She brushed her teeth.

And she went to take the test.

Now, on Thursday night when she should have been watching TV, Nory stood on the stage of Sage Academy's Hall of Magic and Performance, trembling. The ceilings were decorated with dragons and unicorns. The seats were dark purple velvet. The curtains on the side of the stage were gold.

A group of teachers in suits looked back at her. They asked her to try all five of the Fs, since some rare kids were double talents. First flaring, then fuzzying, then flickering, then flying.

Nory couldn't do any of those, because she didn't have that kind of magic, so she just politely shook her head.

Then they asked to see her fluxing magic.

She did *not* show them her dritten, her bitten, her koat, her skunkephant, her squippy, or any of her

other mixed-up animals. Instead, she fluxed into her very best kitten, the one she could now hold for up to fifteen minutes without going wonky.

The teachers inspected Kitten-Nory, checking her whiskers and tail, and asked to see some of Nory's kittenball skills. Kittenball was like soccer, but played by kittens and with balls of yarn instead of balls. Kitten-Nory tail-whacked and batted, yag-gled and pounced.

Then the teachers asked if she could do other animals. Most ten-year-old Fluxers would have said no. Advanced kids might have nervously volunteered to do puppy or hamster.

Nory politely asked for a fish tank and a towel.

When those arrived, she showed the examiners her puffer fish.

True, Puffer-Fish-Nory was tempted to go wonky in the tank. Sometimes it was very hard not to let her magic go upside down. But she popped back to girl form before anything went wrong. She climbed out of the tank and dried herself with the towel.

The teachers clapped. They actually clapped!

“Fish fluxing in fifth grade!” one of them said to Father. “Impressive!”

“Thank you,” said Father, as if *he* was the one who had done puffer fish.

The examiners then asked for more animals. “If you have them, that is.”

Nory wasn’t sure what to do. Maybe she wouldn’t go wonky if she fluxed very quickly?

She showed them puppy (for five seconds), goat (for five seconds), and mosquito (for five seconds).

The mosquito got them on their feet. A standing ovation.

“I have never seen a middle-school student do an insect,” said the fluxing teacher. “Not in all my born days.”

“Thank you,” said Father again.

Nory knew that her mosquito had actually had a fuzzy kitten tail. The teachers just hadn’t been able to see it. She had buzzed by them and quickly fluxed back into Girl-Nory.

And then, *phew*. The exam was over.

Afterward, Nory sat outside on a wooden bench in the entryway. She read a book. She watched the clock hands go around.

When she had *flunked* the Big Test, the answer had been clear right away: “Nosirree, we do not want you and your chaotic upside-down magic here at Sage.”

But now, although they knew she was upside down, the teachers had also seen that she had a lot of power. Would they want her?

Did she want them to want her? She did want to be accepted. She wanted to be good enough. And she wanted to please Father, after disappointing him over and over. But she didn’t want to leave Dunwiddle. Or her friends. Or her Upside-Down Magic class.

She waited.

And waited.

Apparently, there was quite a lot to discuss, because it was nearly forty-five minutes before Father

walked out of the Hall of Magic and Performance to shake her hand.

“Congratulations, darling daughter!” he told Nory, grinning. “You’ve been admitted to Sage Academy. You’ll begin after the winter holidays.”

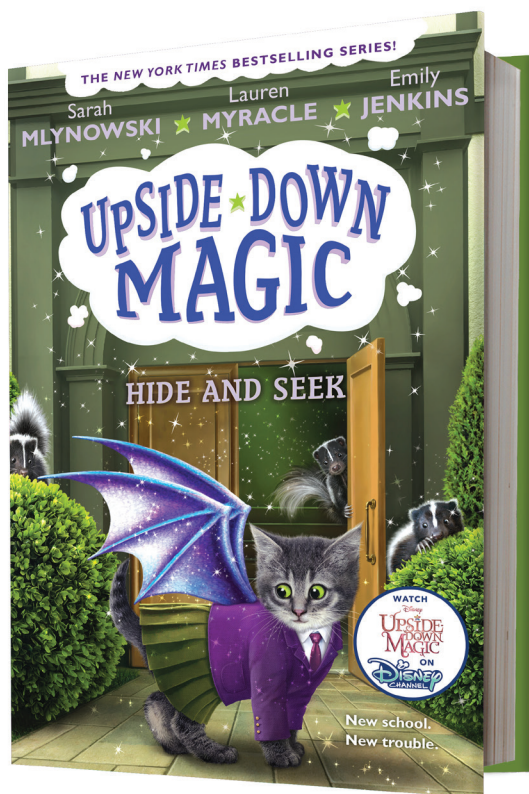
Wow.

Just wow.

Father had never called Nory “darling daughter” before. Like, ever.

But was she really going to leave Dunwiddle Magic School?

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