

# MAGIC

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Three little jumps.

Clack clack **CLACK**.

She loved the noise her little black flats made, slapping hard against the back steps of the house she lived in. Especially when she was going to play in the park. It was small, just a few swings, a rickety slide and some old monkey bars. Sandbox right in the middle, nice shady trees over all. A short block away from their home, and her mother never minded her going alone. There were always neighbors there with their kids in tow, and with plenty of warnings about candy and strangers ringing in her little ears, off she happily went.

If you asked her age, she'd say six and a *half*. She'd be seven soon, and the half definitely made her feel more grown up. Golden blonde, sun streaked hair flowed freely past her shoulders, and her blue eyes were the color of the sky on a cloudless day. Her smile could light up a city block, and as they say in the South, her daddy couldn't tell her no. Truth be told, her mama found it hard as well. She wore a tan jumper over a tee shirt, and practically skipped and danced the short distance to her favorite place.

The day was absolutely beautiful. Cool, but not cold. Not yet. Fall was in the air but taking its sweet time arriving. Leaves of various hues still hung in the trees, clinging to the branches with false hope. The smell of the grass was so sweet and strong that if you described its color, you'd have to say **GREEN**. It was a magical day. And she believed in magic. She'd *always* believed in magic.

As she entered the park, her eyes quickly scanned it for them. A sweet older couple that she always thought of as hers. They were there most days, sitting on a bench, enjoying each others company and exchanging pleasantries with everyone. They nearly always brought along a treat for her of some kind, a piece of candy, a trinket or bauble. She secretly thought, and hoped, that she was their favorite. And thinking that made her happy, deep down inside.

They weren't here, at least not yet. She merrily busied herself at play. With such an active imagination, the little girl didn't really need a play partner. Setting up camp in the sandbox, it quickly became the desert sands, and of course she was a beautiful princess. Always the princess. As she played, there was a sharp pain in her right arm. Like a bee sting, but there was no bee. She knew if she closed her eyes for a bit, it would soon pass. And just that like, it did.

Looking up, she saw *her* couple approaching the small playground. Happiness flooded her like a riverbank in springtime. She jumped up and ran to them, hugging both their legs at once, as they chuckled with delight and patted her back softly. The child noticed a trickle of blood running down her leg. Funny, she didn't remember scraping or cutting herself. Oh well, no matter, as she rubbed it away.

She'd been so excited by their arrival that only now she noticed that the old lady held a big, bright blue balloon by a string. She was enchanted by it. So big, so pretty! Like a little world all its own. The lady noticed that her small friend was captivated by it. She bent and extended her arm, saying,

“It's for you!”

The little girl hadn't dared think it was for her.

“Oh, thank you so much!”, she managed as a reply, and now held the balloon aloft in her tiny hand by its string.

The old man regarded her with beaming kindness, and with obvious love and care in his voice, spoke.

“You can do with it whatever you want, darlin girl. It's yours.”

“Oh...”, she replied, thinking it over. And suddenly she knew. She was sure.

“I'd like to see it fly free!”

“Then fly free, it shall. When you’re ready, just let it go”, he replied.

She took a step back, looking at the couple with an expectant smile. Then she drew a deep breath, and let the string go. The wind caught it, and the blue orb gently soared upward, turning this way and that in the breeze. But up, and free. Always up.

At the exact moment she let the balloon go, her little hand relaxed in her mother’s grip, and her small frame sagged into the hospital bed that held it for the last time. Her heart monitor flatlined with a steady metallic whine. Surrounded by the harsh, antiseptic machinery that treats a patient with terminal cancer, her mother laid her head against her baby’s body and knew that she was gone.

Great, racking sobs began in her. Involuntary convulsions of grief, over which she was dimly aware she had no control. Her girl had suffered so much, finally sinking into a coma over the last few days. A tidal wave of emotions took the young woman, not the least of which was guilt. Her baby was finally free from pain, and the fact that her death was the only thing that could accomplish that caused joy and guilt to melt together with suffering into an emotional storm that was too much to bear. As the nurses unhooked leads and then cleared out to give her time, she let it take her.

The little girl walked from the park now, hand in hand with the older couple, headed for a golden sunset. She could still see the balloon in the distance, its blue standing out still against the gathering dusk. A single ray of the setting sun now caught it, and it shone like fiery blue ice in the night sky.

Magic. She’d *always* believed in magic.