

# The Three Lost Kids & Cupid's Capture

by

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## Chapter 1 - Be My Grumpy Valentine

Red hearts of every shape and size spread out before me, but none of them were good enough. I dropped the scissors on my desk and let the mangled – I'd just learned that word from my dictionary: "damaged by cutting, tearing or crushing" – construction paper fall to the floor around my feet.

Mrs. Jefferson, my first grade teacher, smiled at the class. "How are we all doing on our Valentine's Day cards? Does anyone need any help? Seems there are a lot of grumpy faces for what's supposed to be a day about love and friendship!"

Her smile dropped when she looked at me, probably because of my *extra* grumpy face. "Lexie, is everything okay? Do you need help?"

I crossed my arms over my chest and frowned even more, the muscles in my face becoming tight. "This is stupid. I'm terrible at making cut-out hearts. They're all lopsided. I can't do anything right."

She picked one up. "This looks beautiful. They all do. Why don't you glue it to your card and see how you like it?"

"I already know it will look terrible. I hate it. It has to be perfect."

Mrs. Jefferson creased her forehead the way Mommy does when she's trying to think of the right thing to say, but before she could say anything someone screamed and at least a bazillion markers, glue sticks and pieces of sticky paper fell to the floor. A girl with blond pigtails cried and pointed at her messed-up card.

Mrs. Jefferson shuffled over there mumbling something about everyone's bad mood today.

My sisters would have said I should at least be happy mine didn't get ruined, but it looked ruined to me. Why couldn't I make things work in real life like they did in my head? I was too little, too weak, too slow, the smallest in first grade, and definitely the smallest when I spent half the day in second grade.

The bell rang for recess and I darted out of the class, leaving my failed Valentine on my desk. Billy, the biggest kid in class, crashed into me on the way out and bruised my arm. I cried and rubbed the tender spot, but he didn't even say he was sorry, and he was supposed to be my friend.

My very best friend Abigail grabbed my hand and squeezed it. "Are you okay, Lexie? Want to play?"

"No. I'm having the worst day ever. Do you know where my sisters are?"

She shook her head and frowned, then walked away.

I felt bad for not playing with her, but I just wasn't in the mood. I looked for Bella and Maddie, my big sisters, and hoped they'd be out at the same time.

Maddie stood by the cafeteria, her dog TayTay on a leash as kids grouped around to pet him. She'd been allowed to bring him to school for Show and Tell.

I wasn't even allowed to have my own dog.

She smiled at me. "Hi, Lexie, why do you look so sad?"

"My Valentine's card is terrible. This is the worst Valentine's Day ever."

Bella joined us and the other kids went off to play. She leaned down and rubbed TayTay's head as she squinted up at me. "Why so glum? I'm sure it's beautiful. You always do great work."

"No I don't. Your cards are way better. Mine always look terrible."

Maddie sighed and looked around for Mommy, who had to take TayTay home.

"That's not true. Lexie, you're the smartest seven-year-old ever, so smart you spend half the day in second grade because you're too smart for first grade. Why are you so hard on yourself?"

I shrugged and sank deeper into the grey sadness wrapping itself around me. Everywhere I looked, grey started to wrap around other people too. Normally my own rainbow magic could make the grey go away – a gift I'd received when I discovered a magical world named after me, which I had to save from Garbage Goblins. Today, even my rainbow magic couldn't make me feel better, and I could tell other people were suffering too.

"You're right, though, this day hasn't been great," Maddie said, frowning. "The boy I have a crush on was mean to me, even though I thought he kind of liked me."

Bella raised her eyebrow. "Mom and Dad say we're too young for boyfriends."

Maddie crossed her arms over her chest and gave that look Mommy always teased her about, the one that made her look like a 'tween.' "Fine, my 'friend' hasn't been nice to me today." She actually used her fingers to make quote marks around the word friend, as if that fooled anyone.

This really *was* the worst Valentine's Day ever. For real. Around the playground, more kids fought with each other, fewer played and had fun, and in class all day, everyone seemed extra grumpy and mean.

Either my bad mood was contagious in a pretty big way, or something fishy was going on. With all this grey energy everywhere, my bet was on fishy.

I looked into the faces of my sisters. We all had different shades of brown eyes, but I looked most like Bella, my nine-year-old sister. Maddie was the oldest at ten and had darker, straighter hair than the two of us.

She caught on first and her mouth dropped open. "You think?"

I nodded.

Bella looked back and forth, and then I could almost see the cartoon light bulb flicking on over her head. "Magic? Bad magic?"

I nodded again and reached for my backpack to pull out the Mirror of Ice. I'd once used this mirror to break the curse of the Garbage Goblins. It showed the true nature of things, but also could be used to communicate with other worlds. Mostly, I used it to keep in touch with my Unicorn friends on Lexie World – kind of like a magical version of the face-to-face video chatting we used to stay in touch with Grandma and Papa – but I believed it could help us with this problem, too.

The three of us stared at the mirror as I sent what little rainbow magic I could muster swirling into the icy glass. Most of our magic was lost to us whenever we left a magical world. We'd already been to four magical worlds and a sort of fifth, when our own world became magical for Christmas. So we were used to being around magic and

using it. Sadly though, in our own world, we only had a tiny sliver of that magic, a whisper of it.

But it was enough.

The glass swirled and sparkled and I held my breath, excited to see if any of our magical friends would appear.

Would it be Emerald the Dragon from Bella World?

Lavendaria, the Fairy we'd helped on Maddie World?

My dear Unicorn friend from Lexie World?

Maybe the Sugar Fairy we met when we saved Halloween?

Or the mysterious old woman who'd helped us break the Christmas curse?

The mirror grew bigger and bigger, blocking the kids playing tether ball in front of us, blocking the swing set and the monkey bars, blocking Mrs. Packer as she helped a boy who skinned his knee, and....

Then it wasn't just blocking our world. Our world disappeared as the mirror sucked us into another world!

Rainbow lights swirled around us, and it got so cold my teeth started chattering. TayTay howled, but he sounded far away, and I realized I couldn't see my sisters anymore. "Maddie, Bella, where are you? I'm freaking out here!"

They called my name, their voices as far away as TayTay's howl.

My heart beat like a scared bird, and I squeezed my eyes shut and thought of my mommy and her hugs, the safest place in the world.

When a ray of sun thawed the cold on my arms, I peeked my eyes open... just enough to see where we were.

Or maybe, where we weren't.

We weren't in our world, and we weren't in any world we'd visited before.

Hearts – perfectly formed hearts that I wished I could make – surrounded us: trees with heart fruit, flowers in the shape of hearts, and even heart-shaped clouds.

Something hissed through the air, and a sharp pain stung on my arm. My vision spun as I looked down at my arm, and the arrow sticking out of it. "Help!"

