



Ms. Mulligan
and the
ENCHANTED ICE CREAM

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by
Tiffany Elaine

Ingram Elliott

Ms. Mulligan and the Enchanted Ice Cream

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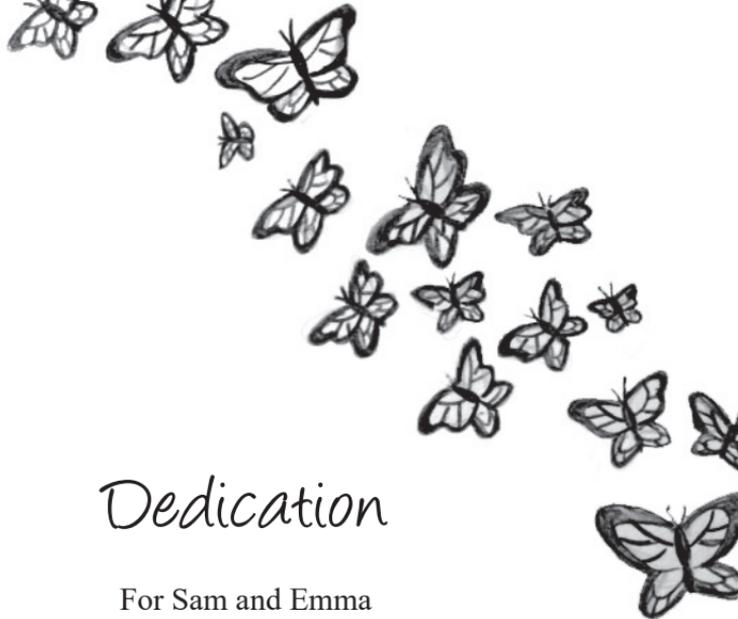
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Dedication

For Sam and Emma

"Seek the bluebird of happiness."

-PEC

"That's why they make chocolate and vanilla."

-DP

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Prologue

The boiling cauldron poured off rancid smoke. The smell didn't bother Mary much, but Meredith always waited outside during this process. She'd never gotten used to the odor of rotten eggs.

"Sister, what do you see?" Meredith called through the open front door, a wisp of coal-black hair sticking to her shriveled lip.

Inside the cabin, Mary stirred a vat of molten silver liquid. She thought it looked pretty, like a pot of melted rings and bracelets. "Nothing yet, Sister," Mary replied, blowing a lock of cotton-white hair from her eyes. "Now, let me work!"

Meredith dug the toe of her boot into the rotten boards of the porch. "Fine," she muttered to herself. "You're the smart one, aren't you, Sister?"

At least that's what Baxter had always said. Although it had been years since their guardian's death, Meredith swore at times she could smell pipe smoke lingering near his favorite chair. "White hair for wisdom," Baxter would chuckle, blowing a ring of smoke lightly into the air. "And black for strength," he'd finish, edging the rocking chair back into a sway.

An evening draft woke Meredith from her daydream. She'd never known what Baxter's stupid sayings had meant anyhow. All she knew was that

she got all the hard work. Mary, the brains; Meredith, the workhorse. Instinctively, Meredith held her lower back. It seemed to hurt all the time these days.

But finally relief was near. Once they had confirmed the brat's arrival, they'd wait for the perfect moment to take her. Only a few drops of the girl's blood—Meredith corrected herself—the *woman's* blood were required. If the process killed her in the end, it wouldn't be their fault. Meredith and her sister, Mary, would be restored to youth and beauty—one with hair as black as coal, the other as white as snow. That was all that mattered now. Besides, Meredith reasoned, one more death could hardly make a difference now, could it?

Mary leaned hunchbacked over the heavy pot and observed her reflection in the dense silver liquid. She noticed with a whimper how her skin sagged, her white hair was yellowed and brittle, and her eyes, once emerald green, now sat in their sockets as dull as peas. She was about to tell Meredith how *old* she looked, too old for her age, when a picture began to form on the liquid and her attention shifted.

“Closer . . . closer . . . ,” Mary muttered to the silvery liquid as if it could understand her.

Meredith bit her jaundiced fingernails and blew a lock of graying black hair from her face. She whispered, “Is she here?”

An unbearable moment of silence settled between the sisters. Mary stared, unblinking, at the picture in

the pot. The young woman in the liquid appeared to gaze directly at Mary. Mary flinched. The resemblance was uncanny. A head of tangled blond hair, deep brown eyes, and something in the woman's gaze told Mary all she needed to know. In the purest and deadliest of voices, Mary replied, "She *is*, Sister."

Mary clambered to Meredith, and the sisters embraced, their hair becoming a tangle of salt and pepper. They felt each other's hearts beat against their own chests, felt the blood they shared coursing through their veins. And as the sisters pulled away with tears in their eyes, all worry melted into mist, for they knew that soon, very soon, life could begin again.





CHAPTER 1

Best Birthday Ever

Tabby set a bowl of vanilla-fudge swirl ice cream on the coffee table. “Yum.” She reclined on Kat’s living room couch, which was covered in unwrapped birthday gifts. Tabby slipped on a new pair of sparkly flip-flops and removed a set of wireless headphones from their package.

“So, what’s your birthday wish, Tabitha?” Dolly said in her thick southern drawl, pulling an old-lady shawl over her floral sleeping gown. Dolly, named after the famous country singer, had been raised by her North Carolina grandparents, who hoped their own Dolly might hit the big time too. “Twelve years old tomorrow!” Dolly continued with a single clap of her hands.

Tabby scooped a giant blob of vanilla-fudge ice

cream into her bowl. “I can’t believe your mom let us sleep over on a Sunday, Kat.”

“Yeah,” Kat snorted. “It was either this or I signed her up for kindergarten snack duty next month. And you know how much Delia *loves* kids.”

Tabby swallowed a big bite of ice cream and smiled. “Well, I’m glad it worked.”

Dolly pushed on. “What about your birthday wish, Tabitha? You can have anything you like. We could even go back to Grammy Hargrave’s house at Silver Mountain this summer!”

“Last summer was enough!” Kat moaned. She brushed spiky black bangs from her eyes and pulled a toothpick from a tattered military backpack. She stuck the toothpick in the corner of her mouth and continued. “It’s March and my butt’s still sore from all the horseback riding.”

“You’re such a city girl, Kat,” Dolly chirped, patting her platinum-blond bob. “Oh, I do miss Buckets-O-Cream. None of this Florida soft-serve tastes as good as that good ol’ North Carolina homemade ice cream.” Dolly’s eyes glazed over and she murmured, “Tabitha, pass me the butter pecan, please.”

Tabby, surrounded by no less than ten pints of gourmet ice cream, found the yellow tub and handed it to Dolly.

“Ha!” Kat spat. “That Buckets place was a dump! They tried to sell us rotten ice cream. I filed a report with the FDA after we got back.”

“You didn’t!” Dolly exclaimed.

“Remember those weird old ladies that worked there? I still don’t understand why they kept trying to get me to eat their ‘homemade chocolate and vanilla,’” Tabby mused, making air quotes with her fingers.

“Well, those were not the usual girls who work at Buckets. I didn’t care for their attitude much,” said Dolly, savoring a dainty spoonful of butter pecan.

“I gave in and ate their stupid ice cream,” Tabby said as she stuck another spoonful of vanilla-fudge swirl in her mouth and sucked the spoon clean, “but it tasted funny.”

“So,” Dolly said, clapping her hands together with glee, “what IS your birthday wish, Tabitha?”

Tabby’s cheeks flushed. She took another huge bite of ice cream to conceal a smile.

“What?” Kat pressed, grabbing the tub of cookie dough ice cream and shoving an enormous mound into her mouth.

Tabby mumbled, “I’gh, lijd’ to gin wof’ Finn ta da dez nez year.”

Dolly and Kat cried in unison, “What??”

Tabby swallowed hard. “I want to go with Finn to the junior high dance next year,” she repeated.

“Ouch!” Kat said, holding her head. “Brain freeze.”

“But, Tabitha,” Dolly retorted, “you just went with Finn last month to the Valentine’s Day dance!”

Dolly snatched a floral-cased iPhone from the table and pulled up a picture of Finn and Tabby holding hands beneath a giant red heart. Tabby wore a spaghetti-strap pink dress, and Finn looked casually cool in brown suit pants and a vintage striped shirt. He was a few inches taller than Tabby and his brown hair flopped onto his forehead.

Tabby touched a four-leaf-clover charm that hung around her neck and replied, “Yeah, but there’s no harm in planning ahead!”

“Whatever!” Kat yelled, grasping at the couch.

Just as Kat was about to blast Tabby in the head with a throw pillow, a loud knock echoed through the living room. The girls turned to see Finn tapping on the dark living room window, alongside his bespectacled best friend, Rupert. Finn grinned and held up a wrapped present.

Upon seeing the intruders, Dolly threw a sleeping bag over her head and squealed as Tabby smiled shyly and waved hello.

Kat ran out the front door, bellowing, “BOYS!” A moment later, she returned to the living room, panting.

“KEEP IT DOWN IN THERE!” a man’s voice boomed from the bedroom.

“SORRY, POP!” Kat yelled, and tossed a small wrapped package to Tabby. “I ran . . . them off. It was . . . Finn and Rupert.”

Dolly nodded and said, “Duh!”

Tabby set down her bowl and tore open the small package. Before she could see what was inside, Dolly ripped the box from her hands and grimaced when she saw the gift.

“It’s just paper, for heaven’s sake!” Dolly moaned.

“Give me that,” Kat said, snatching the box from Dolly. “Movie tickets,” she said, handing them to Tabby. “For that new romantic comedy you wanted to see.”

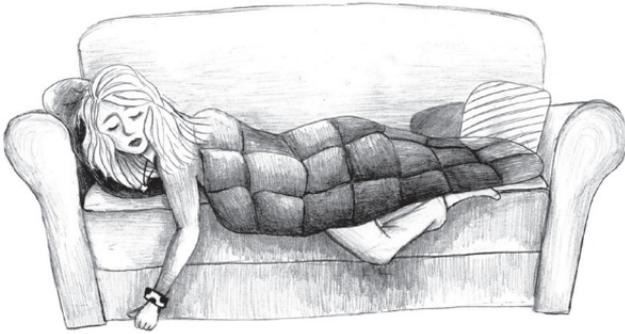
Tabby flushed a little at the thought. Next weekend, she and Finn would be watching a movie together. Along with his mother, of course, who always chaperoned their outings.

Kat grabbed the tub of mint chocolate chip ice cream and collapsed on the couch. “He must really like you, Tab!”

“AAGGH!” Dolly yelled, and pushed Tabby off the couch. “He loves you!”

Tabby tumbled to the carpet.

Kat joined in with a throw pillow to Tabby’s head, and all three girls rolled on the floor in hysterical laughter. It was the best birthday ever.



CHAPTER 2

Waking Up Mulligan

The next morning when the sky was barely gray, Dolly woke first. She stretched, went to the bathroom, fixed her hair, and returned to the living room to wake Kat and Tabby. Upon approaching the couch, Dolly stopped in her tracks and screamed.

In one furious movement, Kat threw her blanket aside and hopped from the loveseat, ready for a fight. “What?!” she shouted groggily. “What’s the matter?”

Eyes wide and unable to speak, Dolly pointed to the couch where Tabby had drifted to sleep the night before. A mess of tangled blond hair sprayed the pillow behind the head of a fully grown *woman* in Tabby’s lavender sleeping bag. One long leg fell at a weird angle from the couch toward the floor.

Kat gasped. “I’ll get Dad!”