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Opening extract from
Harper and the Scarlet Umbrella

Written by
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For all of my family, who made my childhood bright.
And for wonderful Amelie, who makes the magic real.
With special thanks to Alasdair Malloy and The Royal
Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra.

C.B.

For the beautiful Marie. A magical musician and
wonderful sister xxx
L.E.A.

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CERRIE BURNELL

Illustrated by Laura Ellen Anderson

 SCHOLASTIC



Once there was a girl called Harper who had a rare musical gift. She heard songs on the wind, rhythms on the rain and hope in the beat of a butterfly's wing. Harper could play every instrument she ever picked up, without learning a single note. Sometimes late at night, alone with her cat, Midnight, Harper heard a melody that made her heart stand still. For it seemed that it came from the stars themselves. . .



Chapter One THE BROKEN UMBRELLA

From the fourteenth floor of the Tall Apartment Block, Harper gazed dreamily across the City of Clouds. Trams rumbled through heavy rain and bright umbrellas bobbed like little boats.

“Darling, I’m leaving with the Dutch Opera House in ten minutes sharp,” Great

Aunt Sassy cooed, as she stitched a pink petticoat into a gorgeous twirly gown. “They’re picking me up by helicopter.”

Harper smiled and put her arms around her Great Aunt Sassy’s large waist, the

scent of lavender tickling her nose. Sassy Miller was the chief dressmaker for the Dutch Opera House. It was her job to sew hems, knit hats and create fabulous dresses.

Every four weeks, when the moon was round and full, Great Aunt Sassy travelled to Holland to check on all her beautiful gowns. Harper secretly liked it when Great Aunt Sassy went away, as she got to stay with the other residents of the Tall Apartment Block. Tonight she was staying with strange old Elsie Caraham, who lived on the topmost floor. Tomorrow she was with Madame Flora at the ballet school, on floor three.

The sound of a whirring helicopter filled



the little flat. “My ride has arrived!” Great Aunt Sassy cheered, seizing her suitcase and charging out the door.

Harper ran to catch up with her, grabbing her yellow umbrella as she went. As they stepped on to the rooftop a Heartbeat of rain drummed from the sky. Harper hardly noticed. In the City of Clouds it rained every day, in many different ways, pouring down water that was good enough to drink.

There was:

Summer Dew: a light rain that barely touched you.

Sea Mist: a soft rain which emerged from the air like fog.

Heartbeat: an even rain, steady as your heart.

Cloudburst: a downpour that soaked you to the skin.

Icefall: a hard rain that struck like hail.

Thunder Break: when the sky was alive with storms.

“Have a weekend as wonderful as you,” Sassy beamed, kissing Harper’s forehead and struggling into the helicopter.

“I will,” Harper giggled, her mind already skipping at the thought of the fun she was going to have.

But as the helicopter span into the clouds, the force from its propellers snatched Harper’s yellow umbrella and tossed it into

the air. Harper gave a squeal as it was thrown in a puddle at her feet, badly torn.

From the sky above, Great Aunt Sassy peered down and almost dropped her teacup.

“Whatever will we do?” she groaned. “Everyone in the City of Clouds owns an umbrella and now Harper’s is ruined.” She leaned through the swathes of swirling cloud, took a deep breath and then – knowing that Harpers life would change for ever – called, “Darling, you must use the Scarlet Umbrella. It was left to you by...”

But Great Aunt Sassy’s words were stolen away by the wind. Harper was alone, a little girl on a rooftop with a broken umbrella.

