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Opening extract from

# Illustrated Mum

Written by

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Published by

**Random House**

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Cross

Marigold started going weird again on her birthday. Star remembered that birthdays were often bad times so we'd tried really hard. Star made her a beautiful big card cut into the shape of a marigold. She used up all the ink in the orange felt-tip colouring it in. Then she did two sparkly silver threes with her special glitter pen and added 'Happy Birthday' in her best italic writing. They do Calligraphy in Year Eight and she's very good at it.

I'm still in the Juniors and I'm useless at any kind of writing so I just drew on my card. As it was Marigold's thirty-third birthday I decided I'd draw her thirty-three most favourite things. I drew Micky (I'd never seen him but Marigold had described him enough times) and Star and me. Then I drew the Rainbow Tattoo Studio and the Victoria Arms and the Nightbirds club. I did them in the middle all clumped together and then round the edges I drew London and the seaside and the stars at night. My piece of paper was getting seriously crowded by this time but I managed to cram in a CD player with lots of Emerald City CDs and some high heels and a bikini and jeans and different coloured tight tops and lots of rings and bangles and earrings.

I was getting a bit stuck for ideas by this time and I'd rubbed out so often that the page was getting furry so I gave up and coloured it in. I wanted to do a pattern of marigolds as a border but Star had used up the orange already, so I turned the marigolds into roses and coloured them crimson. Red roses signify love. Marigold was very into symbols so I hoped she'd understand. Then on the back I did a great garland of red roses to signify a whole bunch of love and signed my name.

We gave her presents too. Star found a remixed version of Emerald City's greatest hits for only £2 at the Saturday morning market. I bought her a sparkly hair clasp, green to match her eyes. We even bought a special sheet of green tissue paper and a green satin ribbon to wrap up the presents.

'Do you think she'll like them?' I asked Star.

'You bet,' said Star. She took the hair clasp and opened it up so its plastic claws looked like teeth. 'I am a great present,' she made it say, and then it bit the tip of my nose.

Marigold gave us both big hugs and said we were darlings but her great green eyes filled with tears.

'So why are you crying?' I said.

'She's crying because she's happy,' said Star. 'Aren't you, Marigold?'

'Mm,' said Marigold. She sniffed hard and wiped her eyes with the back of her hand. She was shaking but she managed a smile. 'There. I've stopped crying now, Dol, OK?'

It wasn't OK. She cried on and off all day. She cried when she listened to the Emerald City CD because she said it reminded her of old times. She cried when I combed her hair out specially and twisted it up into a chic pleat with her new green clasp.

'God, look at my neck! It's getting all wrinkly,' she said. She touched the taut white skin worriedly while we did our best to reassure her. 'I look so old.'

'You're not old at all. You're young,' said Star.

'Thirty-three,' Marigold said gloomily. 'I wish you hadn't written that right slap bang in the middle of your card, darling. I can't believe thirty-three. That was the age Jesus was when he died, did you know that?'

Marigold knew lots about the Bible because she was once in a Church Home.

'Thirty-three,' she kept murmuring. 'He tried so hard too. He liked kids, he liked bad women, he stuck up for all the alternative people. He'd have been so cool. And what did they do? They stuck him up on a cross and tortured him to death.'

'Marigold,' Star said sharply. 'Look at Dol's card.'

'Oh yes, darling, it's lovely,' Marigold said. She blinked at it. 'What's it meant to be?'

'Oh, it's stupid. It's all a mess,' I said.

'It's all the things you like most,' said Star.

'That's beautiful,' said Marigold, looking and looking at it. Then she started crying again.

'Marigold!'

'I'm sorry. It's just it makes me feel so awful. Look at the pub and the high heels and the sexy tops. These aren't mumsie things. Dol should have drawn . . . I don't know, a kitten and a pretty frock and . . . and Marks and Spencer's. That's what mums like.'

'It's not what you like and you're my mum,' I said.

'Dol spent ages making you that card,' said Star. She was starting to get red in the face.

'I know, I know. It's lovely. I said. I'm the hopeless case. Don't you get what I'm saying?' Marigold sniffed again. 'Anyway, let's have breakfast. Hey, can I have my cake now? Birthday cake for breakfast! Great idea, eh, girls?'

We stared at her.

'We didn't get you a cake,' said Star. 'You know we didn't. We asked and you said a cake was the very last thing you wanted, remember?'

'No,' said Marigold, looking blank.

She'd gone on and on that we mustn't get her a cake because she was sure she was starting to put on weight and the icing would only give her toothache and anyway she didn't even like birthday cake.

'I love birthday cake,' said Marigold. 'I always have a special birthday cake. You know how much it means to me because I never had my own special birthday cake when I was a kid. Or a proper party. I hate it that you girls don't want proper parties and you just go to stupid places like Laser Quest and McDonald's.'

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