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Hilary McKay

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Chapter One

When Saffron was eight, and had at last learned to read, she hunted slowly through the colour chart pinned up on the kitchen wall.

It was a painter's colour chart, from an artists' materials shop. It showed all the colours a painter could ever need. There were rows and rows of little squares, each a different shade of red or blue or green or golden yellow. Every little square had the name of the colour underneath. To the Casson children those names were as familiar as nursery rhymes. Other families had lullabies, but the Cassons had fallen asleep to lists of colours.

Saffron found Indigo almost at once, a smoky dark blue on the bottom row of the chart. Indigo was two years younger than Saffron. His name suited him exactly.

'If there is one thing your mother was good at,' Bill

Casson, the children's father would say, 'it was choosing names for you children!'

Eve, the children's mother, would always look pleased. She never protested that there might be more than one thing that she was good at, because she never thought there was.

Indigo was a thin, dark-haired little boy with anxious indigo-coloured eyes. He had a list in his head of things that did not matter (such as school), and another list of things that did. High on Indigo's list of things that mattered was his pack. That was how he thought of his sisters. His pack.

Saffron was the middle one of the pack.

Saffron had to climb on to a stool to see the colour chart properly. The stool had a top of woven string that was coming unwoven, and its legs rocked on the irregular tiles of the kitchen floor.

'I can't find me,' she grumbled to Indigo, wobbling on the stool. 'I can't find Saffron written anywhere.'

'What about the rest of us?' asked Indigo, not looking up. 'What about the baby?'

Indigo was crouched on the hearth rug sorting through the coal bucket. Pieces of coal lay all around. Sometimes he found lumps speckled with what he believed to be gold. He looked like a small black devil in the shadowy room with the firelight behind him.

‘Come and help me look for Saffron!’ pleaded Saffron.

‘Find the baby first,’ said Indigo.

Indigo did not like the baby to be left out of anything that was going on. This was because for a long time after she was born it had seemed she would be left out of everything, and for ever. She had very nearly eluded his pack. She had very nearly died. Now she was safe and easy to find, third row up at the end of the pinks. Rose. Permanent Rose.

Rose was screaming because the health visitor had arrived to look at her. She had turned up unexpectedly, from beyond the black, rainy windows and picked up Rose with her strong, cold hands, and so Rose was screaming.

‘Make Rose shut up!’ shouted Saffron from her stool. ‘I’m trying to read!’

‘Saffron reads anything now!’ the children’s mother told the health visitor proudly.

‘Very nice!’ the health visitor replied, and Saffron looked pleased for a moment, but then stopped when the health visitor added that her twins had both been fluent readers at four years old, and had gone right through their junior school library by the age of six.

Saffron glanced across to Caddy, the eldest of the Casson children, to see if this could possibly be true.

Caddy, aged thirteen, was absorbed in painting the soles of her hamster's feet, but she felt Saffron's unhappiness and gave her a quick, comforting smile. Since Rose's arrival the Casson family had heard an awful lot about the health visitor's multi-talented twins. They were in Caddy's class at school. There were a number of rude and true things that Caddy might have said about them, but being Caddy, she kept them to herself. Her smile was enough.

Caddy appeared over and over on the colour chart, all along the top row. Cadmium lemon, Cadmium deep yellow, Cadmium scarlet and Cadmium gold.

No Saffron though.

'There *isn't* a Saffron,' said Saffron after another long search. 'I've looked, and there isn't! I've read it all, and there *isn't*!'

Nobody seemed to hear at first. Caddy continued painting her hamster's feet. The baby continued screaming. Eve continued explaining to the health visitor (who frightened her very much) that she had not noticed anything at all wrong with Rose until the health visitor had pointed it out, and the health visitor continued tut-tutting.

'*I can't find Saffron!*' complained Saffron crossly.

Indigo said, 'Saffron's yellow.'

'I *know* Saffron's yellow!'

'Well then, look under the yellows,' said Indigo, and tipped the whole of the coal bucket upside down in the hearth, enveloping his end of the room in a cloud of coal dust.

This made the health visitor start coughing as well as tutting.

'I don't know how you keep your patience!' she said to Eve. Her voice showed that she thought it would be much better if Eve did not. She had dropped in to weigh Rose, as she often did, and had noticed at once that the baby had gone a very strange colour. A sort of brownish mustard. She seemed to think it was a terrible thing that Rose should have gone mustard without anybody noticing. She began undressing her.

'I've looked under *all* the yellows,' said Saffron loudly and belligerently, 'and I've looked under *all* the oranges too, and there *isn't* a Saffron!'

Rose wailed even louder because she didn't want to be undressed. Her mother said, 'Oh, darling! Darling!' Indigo began hammering at likely-looking lumps of coal with the handle end of the poker. Caddy let the hamster walk across the table and it made a delicate and beautiful pattern of rainbow-coloured footprints all over the health visitor's notes.

'*Why* isn't there a Saffron?' demanded Saffron. 'There's all the others. What about me?'

Then the health visitor said the thing that changed Saffron's life. She looked up from unpicking something out of Rose's clenched fist and said to the children's mother:

'Doesn't Saffron know?'

The words fell into a moment of silence. Rose held her breath between roars. Caddy's head jerked up and her eyes were startled. Indigo stopped hammering. Eve went scarlet and looked very confused and began an unhappy mumble. A not-yet, not-now sort of mumble.

'Know what?' asked Saffron, looking from the health visitor to her mother.

'Nothing, dear,' said the health visitor in a bright, careless voice, and Saffron, who had been frightened without knowing why, allowed herself to believe this was true.

'Nothing, nothing!' repeated the health visitor, half singing the words, and then in a completely different voice, 'Good heavens! What on earth is this?'

Rose's fist had come undone, revealing that she held a tube of paint (Yellow Ochre), obviously very much sucked.

'Paint!' said the health visitor, absolutely horrified. '*Paint*! PAINT! She's had a tube of paint! This household . . . I don't know! *She's been sucking a tube of paint!*'

'What colour?' asked Indigo immediately.

'Yellow Ochre,' Caddy told him. 'I gave it to her. I didn't think she'd suck it. Anyway, I'm only using non-toxic colours.'

'Caddy!' said her mother, laughing. 'No wonder she's gone such a funny colour!'

'I'm ringing the hospital!' said the health visitor, in a voice of controlled calm. 'Wrap her up in something warm! Don't give her anything to drink! We'll go straight to Casualty . . ."

Then for a while Saffron forgot her worries while they all tried to convince the health visitor that none of Caddy's colours were in the least poisonous, and that Rose, except for needing washing, was quite all right.

'But *why* did you give it to her?' the health visitor asked Caddy.

'To make her let go of the Chinese white,' said Caddy.

'Chinese white's sweet,' explained Saffron, and then there was another fuss. While it was going on Indigo got bored and went back to his gold hunting, bashing a lump of coal so hard that pieces flew everywhere, and the baby got a chunk to suck, and the hamster jumped in fright into the health visitor's bag, and the health visitor said, 'Thank goodness my twins! . . . If that hamster has made a mess . . . I suppose this is what they

call artistic . . .'

'Yes,' said Eve eagerly. 'They are all very . . .'

'You need the patience of a saint in my job!' said the health visitor as she left.

After she had gone the children's mother hunted through the kitchen cupboards looking for something for tea. While she was doing it she cried a bit because it was so hard being an artist with four children to look after, especially in wet weather when rain blew under the kitchen door and down all the chimneys and into the bonnet of the car so that it would not start and she could not get to the supermarket. She thought wistfully of the shed at the end of the garden, her favourite place in the world.

Only Rose noticed she was crying. Rose watched her with unsurprised blue eyes, enjoying the sniffs.

The kitchen cupboard was full of non-food sorts of food. Lentils and cereal and packet sauces and jam. Eve had almost given up hope when she unearthed a large and completely unexpected tin of baked beans, the sort with sausages in, a small miracle.

'Daddy must have bought them!' she exclaimed, as happy as she had been miserable a moment before.

The beans changed everything. Saffron took over the toaster. Caddy put the hamster into its cage and cleared

the table. Indigo picked up his lumps of coal. Permanent Rose sucked a crust of bread and smiled at everyone and waited patiently until someone should think of scrambling her an egg. Eve stirred the beans and sausages and was grateful to Bill Casson, the children's father. He was a real artist, not a garden shed one like herself. He was such a very real artist that he could only work in London. He rented a small studio at enormous expense, and only came home at weekends. Real artists, he often explained to Caddy and Saffron and Indigo, cannot work with three children under their feet and a baby that wakes up several times every night.

'Clever, clever Daddy, buying beans!' said Eve.

'Rose could have an egg,' suggested Caddy, reading Rose's mind.

'I wonder if Dad bought anything else,' said Indigo, and he and Saffron at once began searching the kitchen cupboards themselves, hoping for more surprises. A lump of coal turned up, with a glitter of gold on it, and a bag of squashed pink and white marshmallows which they floated on hot chocolate and shared with Rose from the end of a spoon.

It was a very happy evening and bedtime before Saffron asked again, 'Why isn't my name on the colour chart? Why isn't there a Saffron?'

'Saffron is a lovely colour,' said her mother evasively.

'But it's not on the chart.'

'Well . . .'

'The others are.'

'Yes.'

'But not me.'

'I thought of calling you Siena. Or Scarlet.'

'Why didn't you?'

There was a long, long pause.

'It wasn't me who chose your name.'

'Dad?'

'No. Not Daddy. My sister.'

'Your sister who died?'

'Yes. Go to sleep, Saffy. Rose is crying. I've got to go.'

'Siena,' whispered Saffy.

Saffy had a dream that came over and over. In the dream was a white paved place with walls. A sunny place, quiet and enclosed. There were little dark pointed trees and there was the sound of water. The blue sky was too bright to look at. In the dream something was lost. In the dream Saffy cried. In the dream was the word, Siena.

Caddy's bed was close enough to touch. Saffy could tell by the feel of the darkness that she was awake.

She said, 'Caddy, how long ago can you remember?'

'Oh,' said Caddy, 'ages. I can remember when I could

only lie flat. On my back. I can remember how pleased I was when I learned to roll.'

'You can't!'

'I can. And I remember learning to crawl. It hurt my knees.'

'No one can remember that far back!'

'Well, I can. I remember it quite clearly. The burny feeling it gave my knees.'

'Do you remember a white stone garden?'

'What white stone garden?'

'Siena.'

'No,' said Caddy. 'That was you, not me.'

The next morning Indigo gave Saffron his gold-speckled lump of coal, and Cadmium added an extra colour square to the top row of the paint chart, Saffron Yellow. In London Bill Casson shut up his small (and very expensive) studio midweek, and caught the first train home.

None of these things meant anything at all to Saffron. All she could think of was the terrible news that she had forced from Eve the night before. Bit by bit, while Rose slept and Indigo argued and Caddy watched and was silent, Saffron had dragged it out.

That was how she discovered that Eve was not her mother. Nor was a real (and nearly successful) artist in

London her father. Worst of all, Caddy and Indigo and Rose were not her brother and sisters.

'You're not my family,' said Saffron.

'We are!' cried Eve. 'Of course we are! We adopted you! We wanted you! Your mother was my sister! Caddy and Indigo and Rose are your cousins!'

'That doesn't count,' said Saffron.

'I'm not doing this right,' said Eve, weeping. 'There are books on how to do it right. I have read them. You were only three. You looked just like Caddy. You called me Mummy. You were so happy. Almost as soon as you arrived, you were happy!'

'Why was it a secret?'

'It wasn't a secret!' protested Eve, trying to hug Saffron (who ducked). 'I was waiting for the right time to tell you, that's all. And the longer I left it, the harder it was. I should have done right from the start!'

'Caddy knew! And didn't tell me!'

'I forgot,' said Caddy.

'Forgot!'

'Nearly always.'

'No wonder I'm not on the colour chart,' said Saffron.

Everything seemed to change for Saffron after the day she deciphered the colour chart, and discovered that

her name was not there, and found out why this was. She never felt the same again. She felt lost.

'But everything is just the same,' said Bill, trying to help. 'Nothing has changed, Saffy darling. We love you just as much as we ever did. You are just as much ours as you always were.'

'No I'm not,' said Saffy.

Eve produced photographs of Saffy's mother, but they were very confusing. Saffron's mother had been Eve's twin sister. They were so alike that even Eve had to puzzle over some of the pictures before she could say who was who.

'What about my father?' Saffron asked.

This was a difficult question. Saffron's mother had never told Eve anything about Saffron's father.

'Your mummy never talked about him,' she said at last.

'Not even to you?'

'Well,' said Eve, sighing as she remembered. 'She was in Italy and I was in England. So it was difficult. I was always going to go and visit her, and I never quite did. I wish I had.'

'Was she an artist? Like you.'

'Oh no,' said Eve. 'Linda was much cleverer than me! She taught English. In Italy. In Siena. You were born in Siena, that's why I thought it would make such a good name . . .'

Saffron was not listening. She looked at the picture of her mother again and said, 'Anyway she's dead.'

'Yes.'

'Killed in a car crash.'

'Yes, darling.'

'Where was I? Did I see her dead?'

'No,' said Eve with relief. 'You were at home. At your home in Siena. With Grandad. He was visiting.'

'*Grandad!*'

'Yes. He was there when it happened. He brought you back here to us.'

'*Grandad did?*'

'Yes, Grandad did. He wasn't always like he is now, Saffy darling.'

The Cassons' grandfather was like nothing at all. He lived in a nursing home. He sat. Sometimes in summer he sat in the garden, guided there with a nurse at each side. Sometimes he sat in a lounge and looked at a television which was not always switched on. Often Eve would collect him and bring him back home with her and he would sit there instead.

Only once, in all his years of sitting had he said a word to show that he remembered anything at all of his previous life. He had said, 'Saffron.'

Everyone had heard.

'Is Grandad still my grandad?' Saffron asked Eve,

when it seemed that the whole pattern of her family was slipping and changing, like colours in water, into something she hardly recognised.

Eve said that of course he was. Just as he had always been. Exactly the same.

'But was he my grandad right from the *beginning*?' persisted Saffron, determined to have the truth this time. 'Like he was Caddy's and Indigo's and Rose's?'

'Yes,' said Eve at once, and Caddy added,

'He is *just* as much your grandad as ours, Saffy. More.'

'More?' asked Saffron suspiciously.

'Much more,' said Caddy, 'because he remembers you. He knows your name. Everybody heard. He said "Saffron".'

'Yes he did,' agreed Saffron, and allowed herself to feel a tiny bit comforted.

Caddy was the only one of the Casson children who could recall the days when their grandfather could drive and walk and talk and do things like anybody else. She told Saffron about the evening when he had arrived at the house, bringing Saffron home.

'He had a green car. A big green car and it was full of toys. He'd brought all your toys, he told us. Every crayon. Every scrap of paper. You used to pick up stones, he said. Little bits of stone. He brought them all. In a tin.'

Nothing was ever thrown away in the Casson family. Saffron went upstairs to the bedroom she shared with Caddy and Rose and raked around until she found the scratched blue coffee tin. The stones were still there, bits of gold sandstone, marble chips and a fragment of a red roof tile.

'Grandad said, "She's cried all the way. Not for her mother. For something else. I should have managed to bring it somehow. I promised I would. I shall have to go back".'

'What was he talking about?'

'I don't know. He went away, that same night. We didn't see him again for ages and ages and when we did he was different.'

'What sort of different?'

'Like he is now,' said Caddy.