

The Three Amigas: Esmerelda's Birthday Adventure



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Written by

Ameerah Mahmood, aged 10

Dedication:

This book is dedicated to young readers all across the globe.

Acknowledgements:

Thank you to my family - especially Yaya (Aunty) Rukhsana, friends and teachers.

Prologue (10 years earlier)

I just about remember it. The freezing cold hands that held me a few days after I was born. I was crying and crying. “Oh shush you stupid baby,” said the lady carrying me. I was still moaning, so she pinched me hard on the neck. A ton of other mean looking ladies huddled up together, and I was just about able to hear what they were saying:

“Her eyes are green.”

“Her hair is brown-orange.”

“Her skin is beige.”

“She is an Esmeralda.”

Esmeralda. That was my name now. Esmeralda. That was what people were going to call me for the rest of my life.

Two years later, I was dumped into a room with a ton of other screaming toddlers. It sounded like they were having a competition to see who could scream the loudest . There was one certain girl that I thought was winning. She was sitting next to me and instantly fell silent as I started looking at her. “Hi, are you new? It's a bit noisy in here, isn't it? I'm Isadora,” she gobbled.

“Hi, yes, yep I'm Esmeralda,” I babbled shyly.

Later on, a slim lady entered the room. She had chocolate-brown hair, tied into two neat buns and a black dress with a neat white apron. Luckily, she looked kind.

“Alright y'all,” she said in a young, thick accent. “It's time for our milk,” the lady cheered, scooping up a blonde-haired baby called Anastasia, who smiled at her devilishly.



Chapter 1 – The Birthday

Guess what? Today is my birthday, I turn twelve.

When I woke up this morning, I noticed three cards on my bedside table.

You may be wondering who they were from?

Ms Wilson, Isadora and Hannah. Ms Wilson was my teacher, Isadora , my one and only true BFF since I came to this awful place, whose forest-green eyes dazzled through her fuzzy brown hair. And lastly, Hannah, who was new last

year (second best to Isdora) with jet black hair, which always seemed to fall in ringlets against her rosy-red cheeks.

Later on that day, I celebrated with the girls in Isdora's room. "Happy Birthday to you!" they all sang. Isadora popped a party popper. Hannah shrieked, she hated loud noises, almost as much as she hated Anastasia. Do you recognise that name? She was the toddler who had blonde hair with a pink bow. Only now, she was not a toddler anymore. She was the meanest, and somehow still the most popular, twelve year old girl in the orphanage.

By now, Hannah was hiding under Isadora's bed and looked as though she was not planning to come out anytime soon.

"Sorry Hannah, I forgot you don't like loud noises. I won't do it again."

Isadora apologised, crossing her heart. Hannah came out slowly.

Suddenly, the loudspeaker crackled as it made an announcement.

{{HANNAH WILLIAMS! REPORT TO THE PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE
IMMEDIATELY!!}}



Chapter 2 – The Plan

When Hannah came back, she looked so upset. Tears were streaming down her cheeks. But not happy tears. She took a few moments before she managed to get her words out, "A couple want to adopt me. They are taking me tomorrow!" she sobbed, her voice thick with tears.

"Oh Hannah! That can't happen!" I exclaimed sympathetically.

Isadora hugged Hannah and said, “If they're taking you, they're taking me too!” and with that she and Hannah left for their room.

The next morning, I woke up from an extremely vivid dream in which I had run away and did not have to go with the mean couple who adopted me. That was it!! It was a sign. That is what we would do... I was going to run away with Hannah and Isadora so that we could all be together forever. I headed to Isdora and Hannah’s room to break the news. I knocked and entered their room. To my shock, they were packing their belongings into a small holdall.

“We overheard you talking in your sleep about your great escape, and we are joining you!” said Isadora with a raised smile. I was so pleased that I was not doing this alone, especially since it felt like a storm was brewing outside.



Chapter 3 – The Escape

As we crept towards the front door, we heard a loud, echoing sound.

We instantly spun around to see a sleeping security guard, snoring gently.

Frightened by the thunder and lightning, a little cat crawled through the door and hissed loudly.

The security guard grunted and slowly started to open his eyes.

We needed to make a run for it!

Sauntering out of the front door with confidence, all of us beamed gigantic smiles.

This was going to be a new start for us, a new life!

As we reached the end of the driveway, already drenched, there stood a black gate, as tall as a giraffe, if not taller. To our disappointment it was locked.

“Great!” we thought. A look of worry soon replaced our beaming smiles. We looked around hopefully to see if there was a way through, getting colder and wetter by the minute.

Isadora took an age to proudly announce, “Good thing that one of us knows how to pick locks!”. We all looked hopeful.

“I just need a clip,” she said.

“Oh, I have one!!” Hannah exclaimed in excitement and pulled out a clip out of her hair, along with a few soggy strands.

“Perfecto!” said Isadora, gleefully, as she unlocked the gate.

And with that, we were off!

Despite the storm, the narrow streets were a lot busier than usual; the night markets were bustling with life, people huddled together for shelter and warmth. We walked at some pace, careful to not lose someone amongst the

crowds. We managed to escape the busy high street and continued our journey towards Trafalgar Square.

I guess we didn’t really have a plan, so we thought we would get there and figure it out.

Once we reached Trafalgar Square, we caught sight of a group of boys being rough with three much smaller boys. The bigger boys were shouting and hitting the smaller boys. It was difficult to make sense of what was going on, even though the rain had finally stopped.

Isadora, being Isadora, wanted to be a peacemaker; Hannah, being Hannah, did not want to get involved. I wanted to call a grown up to sort it out. But it was too late, Isadora was already making her way over, shouting, “Leave them alone, pick on someone your own size!”

We had no choice, but to follow behind her. The older boys promptly turned their attention to us; the smaller boys seemed grateful for the distraction and ran off out of sight.

We all looked at one another, quite unsure as to what we had gotten ourselves into. The boys were scruffy in appearance, with unkempt hair and they were grinning meanly. They were an odd bunch really, one was very tall and a little goofy. The second one was short and let's say a little round – he was panting a lot. The third one seemed to be the leader. He was telling the others to grab us and not let us run away!

To say we were shocked was an understatement. So much for our great escape! We quickly learnt their names (Ronnie, Reggie and Roy); each one of them had grabbed our arms, so we could not run. “You’re coming with us!” declared Ronnie.

“Why?” I asked, adding, “Where are we going?”

Ronnie, the leader it seemed, quickly butted in, “The Sewers!”.

What, where, why? These thoughts flooded through my mind. After what seemed like ages, we reached the sewers. The smell was overpowering, it reeked and it made me feel sick to my stomach. It was dark, damp and cold.

We looked at each other in disbelief.

Before I knew it, Isdora lunged at Ronnie.

She managed to wrestle him to the floor, which was an achievement in itself – considering the size of him. A look of pure anger came over Ronnie’s face, he barked at the rest of his gang and before any of us could make a run for it, they had managed to get Isdora off and Ronnie stood up and shook himself, like a dog would. Isdora, like the rest of us, didn’t quite understand what had just happened. But unfortunately for Isdora, she had made things a lot worse for herself. Ronnie now felt threatened by Isdora and so he had her tied up. They split us up. Ronnie and one of the other boys went off with Isdora, leaving the rest of us alone, cold, shivering and frightened. This was not the birthday I had hoped for.



Chapter 4 – The Park

It was clear Reggie was as confused as us. Without Ronnie around, he had no purpose, nor direction. We used that to our advantage and began discussing how we were going to get Isdora back. Not soon after, the dull, dark sewers got even darker. The lights that previously had provided some hope had gone off for good.

“Who switched off the light?” asked Hannah.

The girls realised that they had to lose Reggie to start with. So Hannah came up with a plan to trick Reggie into going in the opposite direction.

“Reggie, did you hear that?” asked Hannah.

“NO!” he snapped back.

“ I did,” I pitched in.

“What are you talking about?” said Reggie, nervously.

“We just heard someone shout your name! Someone is calling you!” remarked Hannah.

“I think it might have been Ronnie calling you, in fact I’m sure it was!” I added.

“Looks like you are needed. Shall we wait here?” Hannah added sweetly.

“Mhmm. Oh ok make sure you don’t move, otherwise you’ll be dead meat!!” threatened Reggie.

“Sure, we’ll be waiting here for you,” I reassured Reggie.

Reggie started running as fast as he could in the completely wrong direction. We waited until he was out of sight , then we sprinted in the direction where Ronnie had taken Isdora.

Climbing up a metal ladder, we opened the manhole at the top and ended up in what seemed like a dead end - an old wall surrounded by prickly bushes. We looked at each other in disappointment. I saw a decrepit wooden bench with St James Park etched into the top of it.

But where would Isdora be, she can't have just disappeared?

Then I spotted a gap in the wall, surely it was big enough for someone to squeeze through. "Hannah, let's check there." I pointed.

I led her through the gap, once we were through we could hear someone crying.

To our amazement we saw Isdora! For some very odd reason, Ronnie was nowhere to be seen. We ran to her, giving her the biggest hug – I'm sure I must have broken the world record for the biggest, squeezy hugs. Isdora was

so happy to see us - in our excitement we could hardly understand one another.

Everyone was talking over one another so loudly we almost didn't hear Hannah gasp.

We turned around and saw a figure standing by the entrance.



Chapter 5 The Rescue

It was a lady. She had a dog on a lead with her, I could make out she had started walking faster until she reached us.

“What’s wrong, are you ok girls?” said the lady with a look of real concern.

By this point, we were all exhausted. The other two had a look of confusion on their faces.

I started crying and just couldn’t stop. They were tears of relief and pure exhaustion.

The lady with kind shimmering eyes waited patiently.

We were scared. Words were just not coming out. The lady held my hand and wiped away my tears.

She spoke in a gentle voice, “Where are you parents? Are you lost? Shall I call someone?”

I took a few deep breaths and explained, “We don’t have parents and there is no one you can call.”

The lady persisted, “There must be someone I can call? If you don’t tell me, I shall call the Police”.

We decided we needed to come clean and tell the lady exactly what had happened.

She seemed shocked but wanted to help us.

“Girls, you have had a very long day. I think you should go back to the orphanage. It is the safest place for you. You can all still be friends and keep in touch but you can’t just run away.”

We knew she was right, but oh boy would we be in trouble when we got back. The lady said she would help us get back to the orphanage and talk to the Senior Manager so they wouldn’t punish us.

The lady seemed to know an awful lot about the orphanage; as we entered the gates she led us straight to the common room, knowing where to go. She left us there and went to the office, and she was gone for what seemed like hours.

The common room was quiet - there was an awkward silence.

The other children were just staring at us, as though they were expecting something to happen.



Chapter 6 – The Best Birthday Ever

Madam Michelle, the Senior Manager entered the room, with a face like thunder, and was stomping towards us.

Isdora was breathing heavily and Hannah was whimpering. We gazed around hoping that the kind lady was here to help us as she had promised. But it looked like we were on our own.

Before Madam Michelle even began to talk, I blurted, “We are sorry! We won't ever run away again!”

Then, to our delight, the kind woman and her dog came out of the office.

I opened my mouth, then closed it again, lost for words.

“Mrs Hazelnut has explained everything to me,” said Madam Michelle. “Perhaps you recognise her, Hannah?”

Hannah nodded.

“Mrs Hazelnut has kindly offered to adopt all three of you so that you can still stay together!” continued Madam Michelle.

“We understand that you would run away, so that you could not be parted, and now we know how much you all mean to one another, and we don't want to be the ones to break that beautiful friendship,” Mrs Hazelnut said.

Finally, at last. Someone who understood how important our friendship was to us.

“So, would you all care to live with me, my husband and our dog, Betty?” asked Mrs Hazelnut.

Me, Isdora and Hannah looked at each other, grinned then shouted in unison:

“YES!”

This really was the best birthday present ever - and I couldn't wait to get to my new home and celebrate with my new family.



Illustration by Zoya Jullienne

This project was co-ordinated and facilitated by Clare Ford, Founder of Switched ON! the global online academy which is re-defining education beyond academic success.

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Esmerelda is turning twelve – and looking forward to her birthday just like any other eleven year old kid. But, what she doesn't know is that she is about to have the biggest adventure of her life.

Read on to find out what happens on Esmerelda's birthday and why it's a birthday she is going to remember forever.