

CARTE POSTALE



Who sends postcards anymore?  
I wondered when I saw it  
in the mailbox. Then I  
recognized the loopy  
handwriting and my stomach  
lurched, first in relief,  
then in boiling hot rage.

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When Mira receives a cryptic postcard from her missing mother, she sets off with her father and brother to find her in Paris. Only Mira doesn't know she's looking in the wrong century.

With an innocent touch to a gargoyle sculpture on the roof of Notre Dame, Mira is whisked into the past. There she learns her mother isn't just avoiding the family, she's in **serious trouble**. Following her mother's clues, Mira travels through time to help change history and bring her mother home.



"Long after I finished this fast-paced and compelling novel, I thought about Mira. Would I be as determined in pursuit of truth and tolerance? Would you?"

—Karen Cushman, Newbery Medal Winner



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*Who sends postcards anymore?* I wondered when I saw it in the mailbox. How quaint, how old-fashioned. The picture was an old black-and-white photo of a gargoyle on Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris, the kind you might find in a musty antique shop. Even the faded French stamp looked like it was from a previous century. Then I recognized the loopy handwriting and



*Mira's Diary: Lost in Paris*

my stomach lurched, first in relief, then in boiling hot rage. So Mom wasn't dead, kidnapped, or suffering from amnesia. She was gone, plain and simple.

Dear David, Malcolm, and Mira,

I know this has been a shock to you all, but don't worry about me. I'm doing what I should have done years ago. There is so much I need to learn, but believe me I'll be home as soon as I've figured things out.

Gargoyles have always fascinated me. Just think what stories they could tell if we only spoke their language!

Take care of yourselves, and remember that I love you.

Serena (Mom)

I examined the card—front, back, and sideways—but that was it. She'd left us, and all she said was “don't worry about *me*”? I was furious! Such a tra-la-la, have-a-nice-day kind of message when she'd thrown a bomb into our lives, blowing our family apart.

When we first realized Mom was really gone, I was terrified. We called the cops, filed a missing person report, waited with our breath held, and...nothing. A big fat nothing. Funny how quickly I went from being scared that she'd been hurt to wanting to kill her myself.

Dad was a wreck. He expected to get ransom demands from

some mythical kidnappers for weeks. Every time the phone rang, he'd practically jump out of his socks. As the weeks rolled by and he corralled us into therapy, he talked about Mom as if she was on one of her work trips that she'd somehow forgotten to tell us about. She didn't answer her cell phone? The battery must have died. No email? She must be super busy. But after months went by, even Dad couldn't believe his own lie.

Still he swore he didn't have a clue that Mom was unhappy or that she wanted out of our family. He insisted something else had to be going on. Like what, my brother, Malcolm, and I wanted to know. Like Mom's really a secret agent and she's on some hush-hush mission?

Malcolm is sixteen, a couple of years older than me, and his humor kept me from crying my eyes out those first days. Some people think he's too sharp, but to me his sharpness has a reason. Plus, he isn't mean, just scathingly right. He's awkwardly tall and skinny, too smart to be cool, with unruly hair he proudly calls a Jewfro. Looking like that, you need a sense of humor.

Mom says he's just like her dad, with that same drive to succeed, that same need to prove himself, but minus the skill as a sculptor since that's what Grandpa did. I always thought Malcolm was her favorite. He gets better grades, takes harder classes, and actually thinks math is fun. So I knew Mom didn't want to abandon Malcolm. Me, I wasn't so sure about.

Secretly I always wondered if Mom was disappointed in me.

I'm not beautiful like her, though Dad says I'm cute (but then, what father doesn't say that about his daughter?). Mom's face is a smooth oval, her hair wavy, her eyes big and golden. I have her eyes, but that's about it. I'm short, with wild kinky hair and a nose a little too big for my face. Kind of like Dad, I guess, but minus the John Lennon glasses.

What I really wanted to inherit was artistic ability. Not Mom's, but her father's, the one Malcolm is like. Grandpa was such a successful sculptor that he even had pieces in big museums. And Dad is an artist too with his photography. I try, but I can never get on paper what I see in my head. So instead of talent, all I've gotten from Mom is a tendency for dark circles under my eyes. And now this postcard.

Dad didn't have any answers, but he said Mom loved us, would always love us, and someday we'd learn the truth about why she left. Someday, as soon as she could, she'd come back to us. I wanted to believe him, but it sounded so lame. Malcolm was probably right—Mom had a boyfriend we didn't know about and she'd decided to leave with him and not even say good-bye. No note, no phone call, no email even. Until six months after her disappearing act, this postcard came in the mail.

When I showed it to Malcolm, he was just as steamed.

“She's having café au lait in Paris so she can study gargoyles? What kind of excuse is that? What isn't she saying—that she has a French boyfriend? Ooh-la-la!”

“I know,” I said. “She acts like this is an itty-bitty bump in the road, not a slap in the face.”

I slumped into the big overstuffed chair that Mom used to cuddle with us in, used to read books to us in. I thought I knew her. She was my mother, after all. Now she sounded like a chirping stranger. I left the postcard on the kitchen counter with the rest of the mail for Dad to find. And I tried to forget about it, to forget about her.



But that postcard really got Dad going. He was sure it was a message. Slamming cupboards, chopping onions, he started making dinner in the noisiest way possible. That meant he was super excited. Whenever he won an award for one of his photographs, the kitchen looked like an explosion had happened, but it was just Dad making meat loaf to celebrate. That says something about Dad—that he thinks meat loaf is festive. Why was he celebrating now?

“This isn’t an explanation at all. And it doesn’t sound like your mother. Something weird is going on here. I know it!” Dad stirred the spaghetti sauce as if he could read the answer in its thick bubbles. “She doesn’t sound safe. She’s in trouble, or she wouldn’t *not* ask about you guys.”

Okay, maybe it wasn’t a celebration, but Dad didn’t sound mad either. He was worried, but more than that, he actually sounded happy. Could you be happy and worried at the same time?

Malcolm set the table while I tossed the salad. If I let Dad near the tongs, there'd be lettuce all over the place.

"C'mon, you two!" Dad said. "You can't believe your mother would leave you for such a frivolous reason!"

"Define 'frivolous,'" Malcolm said. "If you mean flighty, flimsy, flitty, I'd agree. I can't see Mom dumping us for a stone monster. Even one in Paris. But if you mean Mom's covering up her real reason, which could possibly be just as stupid, I'd buy that."

Dad set the bowl of spaghetti on the table and poured himself a glass of wine. We sat down like it was a normal family dinner. Like it was every day that we got a message from our missing mother.

"Let's be logical about this, think about what we do know instead of guessing about things we don't. Do we want Mom back with us?" Dad looked at me, but I couldn't meet his eyes. To tell the truth, I wasn't sure. Of course, I loved her and I missed her, but my anger was bigger than both those things. How could I ever trust her again?

"Do we?" Dad pressed.

Malcolm shrugged. "I guess. But she has a *lot* of explaining to do. And this postcard doesn't cut it."

"Okay, but we want to give her a chance. We want to be able to forgive her, right?"

I nodded. I could admit that much.



“Good!” Dad forked up a glob of spaghetti like he’d suddenly realized he was starving. His eyes lit up like he’d hit pay dirt, not pasta. “That means we’re going to Paris!”

“Paris!” I squawked.

“Paris?” Malcolm echoed. “When? What about school? Work?”

“That’s my news,” Dad said. “I was going to tell you right away, but then there was the postcard. I got that fellowship I applied for, the one to photograph the Wonders of the World.”

I guess I should explain here that Dad’s a professional photographer. He’s known for his aerial views, but this past year he’s been working on a new project. He wants to select and explore a whole new series of architectural wonders. In ancient times, there were seven wonders. He thinks now there are probably twenty or so, including things like the Golden Gate Bridge, the Great Wall of China, Machu Picchu, places the Greeks couldn’t know about because they didn’t exist yet.

He wants to come up with a new list and then photograph them all so we’ll appreciate and understand the wonders around us. Plus it’s a great excuse to travel to cool places and see amazing things. That’s what he told us when he was working on the grant application, but I have to admit, I never thought he’d get it.

“That’s great news!” I said, though I wasn’t sure it was. I wanted to be happy for Dad, but this was all really weird.

“And since Mom’s in Paris, that’s the first place we’ll go. I’ll



have to decide which wonder to focus on, Notre Dame or the Eiffel Tower. What do you guys think?”

“We’re going with you?” Malcolm asked.

“Well, I can’t leave you here by yourselves. I’ll homeschool you for the year. Besides, you’ll learn a lot just going to the places I’m photographing.”

“A whole year?” I didn’t mind the idea of no school for a year, plus we would travel all over the world. But I wasn’t crazy about leaving my friends behind. And I didn’t believe the part about finding Mom or learning the truth about why she left. Right now I just wanted to forget her. The same way she’d obviously forgotten about us.

Malcolm raised his glass of milk. “A toast to Dad, his fellowship, and a year of travel! When do we leave? I can be packed in five minutes.” He clearly didn’t care about missing his friends, even though he spent every free minute with them. Maybe boys are fickle like that.

“Is this definitely decided?” I asked. “It’s so sudden.”

“You know I’ve been working on this idea for a while,” Dad said. “I guess you didn’t have faith I’d actually get the grant.”

“That’s not it,” I muttered. Though it sort of was.

“She’s afraid she’ll miss the glories of junior high,” Malcolm teased. “Don’t worry. I’ll tell you all about it and you’ll feel like you’re there.”

“I don’t want your school experience. I want mine.”

“Mira, is this really a problem?” Dad put on his concerned *how are you* face, one of my least favorite expressions, right after *because I say so*.

“No, Dad, of course not.” How could I add to his disappointment? I didn’t want to be like Mom, letting my family down. “It’s great. I’m sure my friends will keep me posted on what’s going on. There’s email in France, isn’t there?”

Dad grinned. “Despite the old-fashioned postcard, there is.”  
And that’s how we ended up going to Paris.