



THE
MARVELLERS

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*For the kids missing from magic stories who started to
believe that there was nothing marvelous about them*

&

*for Jason Reynolds, who hates dragons!
Beloved readers, be sure to ask him why.*



THE PARAGONS



PARAGON OF TOUCH

"The hand has no fear!"

The brave



PARAGON OF VISION

"The eyes are wise!"

The sage



PARAGON OF SPIRIT

"The heart beats true!"

The intuitive



PARAGON OF SOUND

"The ears listen well!"

The patient



PARAGON OF TASTE

"The tongue tells truth!"

The honest

THE ARCANUM TRAINING INSTITUTE FOR
MARVELOUS AND UNCANNY ENDEAVORS

✦ ————— LOWER SCHOOL ————— ✦

Salutations and Greetings of the Most Magnificent Kind,

We are thrilled to inform you that you've been accepted into the Arcanum Training Institute for Marvelous and Uncanny Endeavors. Only the marvelous can attend. It is an honor to be chosen by the Heads of the Arcanum, and this invitation means that you demonstrate what it takes to join us. But remember, only your work will guarantee that you can earn the proper degrees to stay with us.

Once your starpost arrives in the Stariary, you will receive a message noting the coordinates of the Level Ones' Stardust Pier and the Institute's location this year.

All the light to you and yours! Good marvelling!

Laura Ruby

*Executive Assistant to Headmarveller MacDonald and
Headmarveller Rivera of the Lower School*

P.S.: No Fewels allowed! If you share this letter with a non-Marveller, it shall disintegrate into dust. Don't test it. You will regret it.





PART I

A BRAND-NEW WORLD



CHAPTER ONE

THE LUCK ROOT



Marvelous. The lucky kids got called that. Praise like honey drizzled on hot biscuits. But Ella's family didn't believe in gassing you up. Clothes ironed? Make your bed? Clean your plate? And most importantly, did you mind your business so nobody was minding *you*?

Even now, during the greatest . . . the awesome-est . . . the most spectacular thing that had ever happened in all eleven years of Ella Durand's life, her parents were squabbling and telling her what to do.

"Did you use the hangers? Gran pressed those mantles herself after the old iron did a poor job," her mama said. "I don't want to see them wrinkled."

Three juju-trunks floated in the middle of the Durands' living room with all of Ella's things neatly arranged and ready for inspection. Their silk linings glowed as a good-fortune spell infused itself into her belongings.

"Yes, Mama," Ella replied, annoyed.

“The conjure-cameo?” her papa asked.

“Yes, Papa.” She patted her chest, the carved medallion of her parents’ faces tucked just beneath her shirt.

“And the braid-hands?”

Ella pointed at the vanity case, where a wax copy of her mother’s hands sat. “Of course.”

Mama tugged one of Ella’s long twists. “I *won’t* have my baby so far away with her head looking a mess. I spelled them with your favorite styles. You remember how to work them? Their waking song?”

“Yes—”

“Aubrielle, my sweet, she has everything she needs.” Papa looked above his newspaper, *The Conjure Picayune*. He tapped his black top hat, which made the ring of tiny human skulls on its brim smile at her. “We should get a move on.”

Mama sighed. “Sebastien, I *still* don’t know about this.”

That sparked their eighty millionth argument about Ella attending the Arcanum Training Institute for Marvelous and Uncanny Endeavors.

Ella plugged her ears. They’d been fussing all summer. Mama and Gran wanted her to stay home and continue to attend Madame Collette’s Conjure École. The whole community was conflicted about whether she should be going. But Papa thought it was time for a new adventure, and she was *more* than ready to leave home.

Everyone went silent as Gran’s rooster companion, Paon, marched in from the gallery porch and crowed.

“Y’all quit all that hollering, you hear?” Gran shouted through the window. “You’re ruining a perfectly good sunset.

This second line is loud enough. The parades are doing too much this year.”

Ella hid her smile. “Can we put my trunks in the car now?”

“I’m coming! I’m coming! I’m coming!” Her little sister, Winnie, burst into the room. Her own little juju-trunk tailed her, the edges of it spilling over with toys.

Ella scowled at her. “We’ve been over this a thousand times. You’re too little.”

“Fine, but can I see your letter again?” Winnie gazed up at her.

“But you’ve got to read it to me—”

“I don’t like to read,” Winnie whined.

“Then you can’t see it.”

“I just want to *look* at it.” Winnie pouted.

“A deal is a deal.”

“Okay!” She stomped her tiny foot. “Okay!”

Ella’s hand relaxed, and with a sigh she gave up the letter. Winnie fingered the night-black envelope like it was a slice of hummingbird cake, her mouth salivating, ready to gobble it up. She tilted it left and right to see it twinkle, squealing as the envelope’s five symbols winked. An eye blinked, a mouth smiled and poked out a tongue, an ear wiggled, a tiny hand waved, and a little heart pulsed. That was Ella’s favorite part too.

The five Paragons of Marvelling.

She couldn’t wait to learn what was marvelous about her and to join a group based on her talents.

Winnie pinched the stardust seal and opened it, then began to read.

Ella would never get over how amazing it sounded. Her very own invitation. Her very own chance to be a Marveller.

“How do you get a marvel?” Winnie asked.

“You’re born with one. They come from your family or community—”

Papa cleared his throat. “Many Marvellers I know have chosen their marvel as well.”

Ella whipped around. “I didn’t read that—”

“Much to learn, baby girl.” Papa returned to his paper.

“What will mine be?” That had been the question Ella had toyed with all summer.

“A conjure marvel, of course,” Mama replied like it wasn’t even a question.

“There’s coupons in here too. Did you see them? They move, and the numbers keep changing like they’re fighting with one another. This one says it has the cheapest weather jars—WAIT! No, now it’s that one.” Winnie’s eyes grew wide.

Ella was amazed by the wiggling coupons and their incessant battles. Sandhya’s Splendiferous Sundry now boasted the most affordable astrolabes, and the prices from Woodfolk’s Wonderous Wares flickered angrily.

“I want to go too,” Winnie begged. “I want a marvel. Maybe I can talk to merpeople.”

Ella swiped the invitation back. “Don’t ruin everything, okay?”

Papa shot Ella a look and picked Winnie up like she was nothing more than a scoop of chocolate ice cream. “Cricket, in just five years, we’ll be packing you up too. The second you turn eleven.”

“If everything goes all right . . .,” Mama whispered under her breath, but Ella chose to ignore that.

Of course everything would be fine. Better than fine. Spectacular, in fact. Marvelous indeed.

Winnie sniffled and buried her face in Papa’s shirt. His bullfrog companion, Greno, croaked as she climbed out of his pocket and got all tangled in his long locs while Mama’s chubby alligator, Gumbo, tromped into the room, then nosed around Ella’s open juju-trunk as if he were the missing piece.

“Is it really in the sky? How does it even float? Isn’t an Institute too heavy to fly?” Winnie asked. “What are Marvellians like? Can we go to their cities?”

“You’ll see, my beloved.” Papa tried to calm her down. “You’ll see.”

Ella glanced at her satchel spilling over with all the research she’d done this summer at the Griotary, listening to all the books and pestering all the griots to tell her all the things they knew about Marvellers and their Training Institute. Mama and Papa interacted with very few Marvellers, so she didn’t know as much as she wanted to.

“Conjuring ain’t marvelling, that’s for sure,” Gran shouted from the porch with a laugh. “And living all the way up in the sky like that can’t be natural.”

Ella squeezed her eyes shut and let her imagination run wild. She had dreamed about what the Institute would be like all summer. But just like the Institute changed locations every year, she’d read, it also never looked the same way twice. While poring over old brochures, she noticed that sometimes it looked like an art museum, other times a grand hotel, occasionally a

camp, and most often, a boarding school. Ella tried to guess how it would look now.

Her parents had told her as much as they could about the Arcanum Training Institute because they *too* had never visited. No Conjuror had ever been a Marveller before.

Until Ella.

Marvellers were born with marvels, light inside them that allowed them to perform magical feats. They lived in the skies above and away from non-magic-having Fewels . . . and Conjure folk.

They were decidedly *not* the same.

Conjurors were born with a deep twilight inside them, allowing the work of crossing spells and tending to the dead in the Underworld. Now Ella would be the first one to enroll, and when she passed all the tests, she'd be the first to join the Marvellian community. Officially. She'd make her family proud. Especially her papa.

Ella's heart beat as if a firefly had been trapped in her chest. She felt like she was ready for anything.

Mama took one last look into Ella's juju-trunks, then she nodded with approval, eyes softening. Ella waved her hand over the latches and the lids flipped shut. She hummed the sealing spell Mama had taught her to make sure everything stayed secure.

"Please get in the red car," Ella ordered.

They sparked and zipped through the back of the house.

Gran hobbled in from the gallery. "Give me some sugar before you leave me."

Ella dove headfirst into the soft, round middle of her grand-

mother, inhaling as much of her scent as she could: a little honey, a little lavender, and a little butter.

“Just remember you come from a mighty tree.” Gran lifted her sleeves and flashed the conjure mark on her brown skin.

Intricate tangles of roots and writhing flowers grew in inky, raised lines along both Gran’s and Mama’s bodies. Over the years, they’d become more and more complex, traveling along their backs and arms and legs. Ella loved tracing her fingers over it when Gran let her oil her scalp, surprised at how it constantly changed—a new bud here, a new flower there as her grandmother used her skills. Both of them were covered with a road map of talents and abilities.

Conjure always left its mark.

Gran kissed a finger and touched the tiniest mole on the back of Ella’s neck, a kidney bean-shaped spot that resembled a tiny birthmark to most, or an unfortunate puffy tattoo to others. It had sprouted like a new seedling ever since she started to work with Gran in their family pharmacy, learning that belladonna loves compliments, trips to the Underworld require pennies in your shoes, and conjure skillet are best seasoned with twilight stardust. The spot had been just the same for so long until it cracked open like a bean bud; a thin line similar to a pen stroke grew out of the mole. Her first mark as a Conjuror that began just as her mother’s had, and her gran’s had, and her great-grandmother’s before that—eager, ready for her to do more conjure work.

“It’s opening up even more. I won’t get to see the progress. But you’ll write to me?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“And tell me everything?”

“Of course.”

“And don’t go wandering around those cities. It’s unnatural to be up there like that. Bad things happen—”

“I know, Gran.” Ella had heard the story about her mama’s twin and how she’d gone missing the one and only time the family had ever gone to a Marvellian city. Her name added to the countless other Conjure folk who had never returned after traveling to the sky. But nothing like that would happen to her. “I promise I’ll be safe.”

Gran kissed her forehead and helped her pull one of her crisp white mantles over her clothes. “You do us proud now, you hear?”

Ella most definitely would.

“Don’t let them give you any trouble,” she said.

Ella winked. “Never.”

“You ready?” Papa asked.

She took one last look around. Conjure skilletts sat on the stove; the family altar blazed bright with tall candles and portraits of smiling ancestors. Shelves full of glass jars boasted twilight stars. The garden crept along the wall as if it too had come to say goodbye. “See you later,” she whispered before darting into the courtyard.

Ella skipped under a massive live oak that grew out of the center, its ancient arms a canopy of wind chimes, blue glass bottles, and shimmering orbs. She gazed up and whispered goodbye to it too. The tree shook.

“Hurry, Ella,” Mama called out. “A storm’s coming.”

Papa’s red car sat in the carriage area.

Ella, Mama, and Winnie piled inside. The conjure emblem

on the house gates flared as it opened. Ella held her breath. This was it.

Papa eased through the streets of New Orleans. Fewels rushed here and there, never looking up or noticing how conjure families opened their windows and sang colorful parasols into the city sky to help hold back the rain. Their stomps and claps rumbled beneath the thunder. A chorus of voices trickled into the car: “Storm keep passing on. Let them journey on. Keep passing on!” Gran always said, “Conjure’s like a really good song, one with a melody and rhythm only *we* can hear and feel.”

The car inched along under the beautiful canopy. Ella spotted candles left in windows and galleries dressed in black, red, and green, all in support of her decision to go to the Arcanum Training Institute. Many folks wore their Sunday best and threw conjure-roses—the beautiful black flowers freckled with crimson that every Conjuror kept close for luck—as the car passed.

The petals rained down on them, and Ella’s heart swelled as the well-wishes made their way through the car windows.

“Good luck, Ella!”

“Praying for you and your success.”

“May the ancestors protect you.”

“Be safe.”

People bowed and tipped their hats.

“The Duvernays don’t have a candle in their window,” Winnie pointed out. “The Beauvais either.”

“Hush now,” Mama replied. “Never mind that.”

Ella was too excited to even ask what that meant as Papa passed the red gates of the Underworld at Congo Square, the gargantuan deathbulls towering over the city and keeping

watch on those wishing to enter the Land of the Dead. She blew a kiss at them, and they each nodded their great heads in her direction.

“Will you miss them?” Winnie asked.

“I don’t think so. Well, maybe not for a while.” She had been so ready to leave home for so long that she couldn’t even possibly think she’d be homesick.

“Will you miss *me*?” Winnie’s eyes grew wide.

Ella tickled her little sister until Papa paused in front of Ella’s best friend’s house. Reagan Marsalis’s whole family stood on their small lawn ready to greet them. Mr. Marsalis lifted his top hat, and Mrs. Marsalis blew kisses. Ella grinned so hard her face hurt.

Reagan raced over to the car, her brown cheeks sweaty from the September heat. Ella rolled down the window.

“For luck.” Reagan held out a bright blue luck root from the Underworld. One of her favorite plants.

Ella reached for it, and the flower walked from Reagan’s hand to hers. “Thanks.”

“Write me?” Reagan asked.

“Every day.”

Ella pressed her face to the window, watching as Reagan chased the car until Papa turned toward the dock. She wished Reagan would’ve accepted her invitation and come with her.

But just as a pinch of sadness threatened to squeeze her heart, a Marvellian water-zeppelin sat on the water waiting like a fallen star.

Ella’s stomach flipped.

This was the most important night of her life . . . maybe of all their lives.

The Marvellian Times

THE ARCANUM TRAINING INSTITUTE TO OPEN ITS DOORS TO CONJURORS

OP-ED by Renatta Cooper

SEPTEMBER 20

A brand-new day at the Arcanum's Lower School—and not everyone is happy. So many angry people will be protesting outside those gigantic sky doors.

Why?

They've done the unthinkable . . . opening the 250-year-old center to the Conjure folk of the world.

After prominent American conjure-politician Sebastien Durand won his case in the Marvellian Courts of Justice, the ban was ruled unlawful and at odds with the Marvellian Constitution.

A magical edit was proclaimed. The Constitution amended. Now Conjure folk can come on in.

But only one little Conjuror enrolled . . . Sebastien's daughter, Ella Durand.

Stars, help her!