



Azmina lay on her stomach in her brand-new backyard. The weather was warm for fall, but Azmina didn't feel the sun on her skin. She didn't notice a dog barking nearby. She didn't even hear her mom singing as she unpacked boxes in the house they had just moved into.

A strange sound had caught Azmina's

attention. The sound blocked out everything else. It was as if someone was whispering the first line of a song.

Magic Forest, Magic Forest, come explore . . .

Through a gap in the back fence, Azmina could see the edge of a forest. Was the music coming from there?

Azmina wasn't used to lying around on the grass, admiring trees. She thought of herself as a city girl, through and through. Well, she used to, anyway. She wasn't quite sure who she was in this new place yet. Back in the city she was always on the go: Singing lessons, playing

soccer with her friends, organizing sleepovers.

But now, there wasn't anyone to organize sleepovers with.

Everything had changed when she and her mom moved.

Azmina liked the kids at her new school, but she didn't have any besties yet.



In school, she had been assigned to a table with two other girls named Willa and Naomi. Somehow Azmina just knew that she was meant to be friends with them. She could feel it, fizzing like bubbles in a soft drink, deep in

her stomach. But she wasn't quite sure how to make it happen.

Azmina sighed. She knew that friendships took time, but she hated being the new girl.

Magic Forest, Magic Forest, come explore...

Azmina sat up. The singing was clearer now. It was definitely coming from the forest! But it was different from any music Azmina had heard before. The melody was like the songs of a thousand birds and the babble of a river all mixed together with the rustling of leaves.

Azmina jumped up and ran to the back fence. She leaned over to get a closer look. Because she was from the city, she'd never seen a real forest up close before. She couldn't take her eyes off it! The leaves had turned the colors of fall. These were Azmina's favorites—brilliant red, fiery orange, and best of all, bright yellow. The forest floor looked like it was covered with treasure.

There was one tree that caught Azmina's attention. It was the tallest of all, with long and graceful branches. The tree's leaves shone as if they were made of pure gold. Azmina felt a little shiver of excitement run up her back.

There was something special about that tree.
Something magical.

As she gazed into the forest, Azmina realized there were other curious things about it.

“I can smell flowers,” Azmina muttered to herself. “But that doesn’t make sense! Most of the flowers are gone now that it’s fall.”

But that wasn’t even the strangest thing. Azmina thought she could smell pineapples and mangoes. Azmina didn’t know much about forests, but she was pretty sure pineapples and mangoes didn’t grow around here!

Now that she was closer, Azmina could hear more singing coming from the forest.

Magic Forest, Magic Forest, come explore.

Magic Forest, Magic Forest, hear my roar!

Hear my roar? What could that mean?

Azmina repeated the words out loud, softly at first: “Magic Forest, Magic Forest.” But each time she said them, her voice got louder. One of the golden leaves on the tallest tree spun up into the air. It danced through the sky, swishing this way and that, leaving a glowing trail behind it.

Azmina watched as the leaf looped its way closer. When the leaf was above her, she leapt up and grabbed it. It was warm from the sunlight. Azmina’s fingertips tingled.



Suddenly, she knew just what to do. Her voice rang out strong and true as she began to sing: