

# StoneSoup



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# StoneSoup

*The magazine supporting  
creative kids around the world*

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## Editor's Note

A man and a bird. Two young dancers. Two chess-players. A “furow” and a fairy. This issue explores what, other than blood and kinship, binds us to others—even, in the case of the final poem, “To Those in a Cage,” to strangers. As Lydia Iloff asks in her poem “Why are friends like that?”:

What is the point of friends?  
Are they supposed to make you laugh? Cry?  
Are they there for you?

These stories and poems will help you answer some of these questions, though I hope Iloff's words will also inspire you to draw on your own well of personal experience. When I was a child, my best friend and I would pretend we were twins because that was how we close we felt. The word “friends” didn't seem adequate for us! Is there someone like that in your life? Maybe your best friend is your twin! Regardless, what can you express—whether through words, painting, or photography—about what a friend is to you?

I look forward to reading what you come up with soon!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Emma Wood'.

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On the cover:  
Jellyfish,  
iPhone SE

by Heloise Matumoto, 13  
Quebec, Canada

# StoneSoup

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Stillwater, OK

# Whales and Cormorants

by Leon Antonov, 12  
Strasbourg, France



## *When a killer whale smashes into their ship, Alan and his pet cormorant have to fend for themselves*

The mission was supposed to be simple: sail out into the Atlantic Ocean, take on board a few specimens. Then his work for the month would be done. Alan Stevenson readjusted his grip on the wheel of his ship, the S.S. *Stormbreaker*, a sleek vision of beauty and a gift from one of his colleagues. It was a windy August morning, and Alan was taking the morning shift at the wheel. To his left, he could see his pet cormorant, Carlo, making short work of a can of seafood. His stomach must have been close to exploding as he was on his fourth can. He cawed at Alan like: “Sup?” In short, everything was going just peachy, or at least until the sonar of the S.S. *Stormbreaker* picked up a vast shape hurtling toward them at the speed of 30 knots.

When he first registered this, Alan thought that he must be very tired and his mind was playing tricks on him. However, the shadow under the waves, which was heading straight for them, seemed very real. Fumbling with the controls, he finally pressed the button on the intercom and as it crackled to life, he yelled: “Large object heading

straight to port! I repeat: large object heading straight to port!” Alan wrestled with the wheel, desperately trying to veer off course, but he was going way too slow. The last dregs of hope he clung to evaporated as the threatening shape’s head breached the surface. Slicing through the water right toward them was a fully grown killer whale.

Alan didn’t feel the whale hit the ship, but suddenly he was tossed out of the pilot’s cabin like a champagne cork. He was weightless for a moment or two, then jolted back to reality when he hit the freezing water with a sound like someone slapping aluminium foil. He sank into blissful unconsciousness.

When he regained consciousness, the first thing that struck him was the sound of waves crashing against rocks. Groaning, he rolled onto his side and spat out a lungful of seawater. Alan felt like a sock that had been tossed around inside a washing machine along with a couple of bricks. Opening his eyes, he saw Carlo looking at him expectantly. Satisfied that his master hadn’t drowned, Carlo resumed his meticulous grooming as he

perched upon a small rock. "I'm alive," Alan croaked.

As his senses expanded, he realized that he was on a beach of pristine white sand. On a nearby outcrop of grey limestone, a dozen or so seagulls nested comfortably, feeding their petulant young. To his right, the beach turned into sandy dunes and then into a dense assortment of palm trees, pines, and bushes. The forest slanted uphill until it evened out into what appeared to be the crater of a volcano, which he presumed to be dormant due to the lack of smoke. *I'll check it out later*, he thought. *For now, I should search for food and water.*

Food, it appeared, was not a problem. Sitting up, he noticed a whole stack of assorted fish and crabs behind his now well-groomed pet. "Wait . . . you fished all of that by yourself?" Alan asked, incredulous. A seabird's expression had never looked so smug.

---

Soon the pair were sitting by a nice warm fire with a few fish hanging over it. The dry palm branches on the beach made excellent tinder. Alan busied himself with culinary preparations: wrapping the fish in palm leaves, he then proceeded to place them upon the flames. While the smoked fish tacos (minus the tacos, of course) were cooking, the sailor made inventory of all his materials. In short, they had: five smoked salmon, seven smoked crabs, palm leaves, palm wood, rocks, and his trusty penknife. Not bad, considering Alan hadn't even started exploring his

island yet.

But one problem remained: he had yet to find a source of fresh water. So, after a hasty meal, Alan set off into the forest. As he hiked into the undergrowth, he noticed that it was already late afternoon. He started to jog. Alan searched everywhere, but nothing even remotely resembling a stream came into view. Finally, exhausted and thirstier than ever, he sat down on a log. And then he spotted a small deer trotting in the direction of the volcanic crater. As a last attempt at getting hydrated, he followed it deeper into the jungle.

The terrain became steep. His head drooped from exhaustion. He would have continued ambling upward forever, except that suddenly our great sailor had nothing to put his feet on, and he tumbled downward, straight into a large body of water. As his head broke the surface, he realized that the volcanic crater had hollowed out into a pool of fresh water! The deer knew the area and lay down to drink. Alan also gulped down great amounts, then called out with a sharp whistle. Soon Carlo appeared in the sky and swooped directly into the water with a mighty *FLOOM!*

There. No more problems with water now!

---

It was the evening of the pair's third day on the island. Alan lay contentedly on a bed of palm leaves while Carlo roosted on a nest of woven palm twigs, preening his feathers. However, Alan was trying to figure out ways to es-

cape the island, no matter how pretty it was. During the night, he heard hooting and screeches in the undergrowth. Finally he sank into fitful sleep.

In the morning, he waded into the caldera of the volcano and admired the view of the island. As he was drying off, his gaze came upon an area of the forest that had been torn to pieces. The trees seemed to have been crushed by a large object . . . *Could that be a small plane?* He hurried down excitedly, and his assumption proved to be correct! It was a biplane—its hull badly dented and wings beyond repair—but he was rewarded with the discovery of a nearly intact engine.

Alan was past ecstasy by this point. Giggling with barely contained glee, he set to work. Two hours and a restroom break later, the engine lay before him, fully repaired and adjusted to aquatic form. With difficulty, he lugged his prize down to the beach, where he started collecting twigs, rocks, and palm leaves. And with a little assistance from Carlo the pro fisher, he used fish grease to prime the engine and then tie it to his improvised raft.

Soon after, the sailor and his bird pushed the raft out into the water. He knew that land was not far from here as in the plane he had also found a map indicating that the island was actually pretty close to the east coast of Africa. As the engine hummed to life, he smiled. He had escaped.

house in Washington. Picking up the TV remote, he switched to the News Channel. “And now let us recount the terrible adventure of a man, Alan Stevenson, who is very lucky to be alive today. Sir?”

“Yes, Mr. Adams, I am. After escaping the island on a raft, another storm broke out and destroyed my raft. My pet and I had to swim ashore. The land was five kilometres away. I’m just grateful that I survived. My boat has sunk, but I think that’s for the best, as I’m going to change careers soon. And even though—” *Click.*

“Ugh. I can’t believe the news stations are still talking about me,” groaned Alan. I’ve got other things to do. Isn’t that right Carlo?”

“Caw!” agreed the bird.

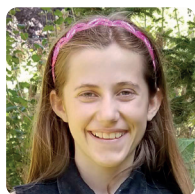
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Nearly a month later, Alan Stevenson lay in his favorite armchair in his





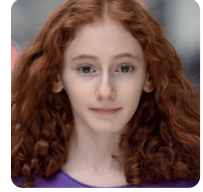
*Cloud Dancer, Canon PowerShot SX600*



by Sage Millen, 12  
Vancouver, Canada

# One Hop at a Time

by Sara Heller, 12  
New York, NY



*After a bad fall shakes her confidence as a ballerina, Sara resolves to get stronger*

The thin black straps from my leotard dug into my skin. My feet stung and ached inside my dirty, pink pointe shoes, and the humid room reeked of sweat. The teacher was saying something in Russian, pointing to the corner. Her face was very much like that of a hawk; her sharp eyes speared us one by one.

Today was my second week at a Russian ballet sleepaway camp. Some of the best Russian teachers were brought to Connecticut to train kids in their style. I shifted my gaze to the corner, and my feet scraped the dusty, blue floor as I moved toward it. The words of the teacher passed through the translator, and her words hit me like a bucket of ice water. "Hops, from the corner, one by one!"

I watched as the girls around me bounced up and down. I, however, was struck with an overwhelming sense of fear. In my dance school, we only did pointe on the barre. Now I was supposed to know how to hop on pointe in the center? My feet had reached the corner of the room, and I found I was in the middle of the line. *It couldn't be impossible, right?*

When the notes of the song began,

the line in front of me got shorter and shorter. My palms got wet and clammy; my whole body felt fragile and stiff with anticipation. Soon, I stood second in line, then first, then . . . I felt a jolt in my toes as I came down from my first hop. The hops were meant to be on pointe, but I fell off my toes so often, anyone looking would have thought they were supposed to be on demi-pointe. There was a big gap between me and the person in front, and I heard groans coming from behind. Suddenly, my shoe came out from underneath me, wind rushed at my face. I felt myself plummet to the floor.

People stopped and eyed me with curiosity. What had happened? One second I was jumping on pointe, the next, I had gotten well-acquainted with the floor. My ears burned like fire, and my eyesight got bleary. A metallic taste lay in my mouth. I quickly scrambled off the floor and stared into my hands. The rest of the pointe class was torture for me. It felt like all the girls in the class were watching me, watching me as I stumbled from pointe during an *échappé* combination.

I wanted them to accept me as a dancer who was as good as them.

For that to happen, I needed to get stronger.

In class, the teachers didn't really notice me. Since I was too shy to ask for help or any corrections, I wouldn't get any better. Even when I fell from pointe, the teacher didn't tell me what to do to stop myself from falling in the future—she didn't even ask if I was okay. I might have even gotten worse at ballet if it hadn't been for my roommate and friend, Clair. One day, Clair came up to me and asked if I needed help. I thanked her, and she suggested I do one-foot relevés to get stronger.

From then on, Clair was my teacher. She corrected my posture and turnout. In less than a week, I knew I had improved a lot.

"Wow, you've helped so much!" I beamed at her one day.

"You're a great dancer, and you learn really quickly," Clair replied honestly. "I only had to correct you once and you fixed it right away!" We laughed loudly and chatted in our cold dormitory, eating chips that filled the air with a salty smell much like the sea. The room was comfortable and I felt content . . . almost.

"Am I bad in pointe?" I queried. I wanted to know what others thought.

"No . . . You could always get better though." Her eyes shifted, and I caught her fingers curling and uncurling like a flower.

"Am I that bad?"

"Well, I think you've grown much

stronger. I'll watch you during pointe tomorrow. That's when the teacher said we'd be doing hops again."

"But what if I fall?"

"You can always get stronger."

"But—"

"Hey! Don't psych yourself out, 'kay?"

"Alright. Good night, then."

"Night."

The next morning in ballet, I worked harder than ever before. During our short break, every molecule in my body shook from the effort. My hands felt hot, and sweat clung to my forehead. Before I knew it, I was tying the long pink ribbons on my pointe shoes. *What if I fall again? Then I'll let everyone down . . . me, my friend . . . I need to do this.* I slipped into the center of the room and warmed up. The tip of my pointe shoes scraped the floor. The shoes had grown soft from hard work. The sun streamed through the dusty window. The long mirror on the wall glowed luminously in the dark room.

"From the corner. Enter after four counts," the tall woman translated. I focused on her hair, long and brown. I looked at the chair, the floor . . . anywhere but the corner. The dreaded corner. I felt faint as I shifted my weight from one foot to the other. Hundred-pound weights lay on my shoulders, and my muscles were sore from how hard I had worked throughout the week. Slowly, I shuffled up to the corner. The gnarled fingers of the piano player hit the

*What if I fall again? Then I'll let everyone down . . .*

keys as I placed myself in line. Fellow dancers rose onto pointe and bounced like rabbits across the room. I watched the flat tips of their shoes slam down on the floor, scattering dust right and left. I felt my throat close up; I wanted to melt into the floor.

Before I knew it, I was next in line. I counted myself in, then was hopping up and down with everyone else. My heart raced like a set of drums; I felt sure I'd fall and humiliate myself and my friend. My knees were significantly bent, and my hops were not perfect, but I didn't look down. I bored holes into the faded blue wall. *Closer... I might make it!* I could almost touch the wall, and my eyes lit up at the thought of success.

Then, my foot twisted, and my knees slumped forward like a sack of potatoes. My sweaty arms flailed in the air as I crumpled to the ground. I grabbed hold of the barre in front of me—my only hope. I held on to it and heaved my body up. I felt tears spring into my eyes but choked them back. I turned around. I hadn't made it.

Clair ran over to me. I thought she'd tell me I had shown improvement, but I hadn't; I had failed. When she reached me, her arms widened and then engulfed me in a hug. I smiled weakly. She was probably trying to make me feel better.

"Sara, you were awesome! I mean, sure, you need work, but on Monday, you fell and stumbled dozens of times. In four days, falling once is a big improvement!" Her words stumbled over each other and her eyes glowed with pride.

"But—but I fell!" I whispered. The

words came out low and broken up.

"We can work on it, sure, but you learn fast. Your hops'll be perfect in no time."

I realized what Clair meant. In less than a week, I had grown much stronger. At the end of camp, I fantasized, my hops would be as good as everyone else's.

"Sit with me at lunch?"

"Definitely!" I replied. I thought back to the first day, how hard I had worked after that, and how much stronger I had become. I ran to take off my pointe shoes and get to lunch.

# Why are friends like that?

by Lydia Iliff, 10  
Sewickley, PA



What is the point of friends?  
Are they supposed to make you laugh? Cry?  
Are they there for you?  
Are they kind? Hard-working? Do they give up?  
Do people like you just because you're rich?  
Will you ever truly know why your friend is being your friend?



# I Am Me

by Lilly-June Gordon, 12  
New York, NY



Who am I?  
It depends  
if you are asking me.  
My peers know only a rendition of me.  
An aloof me.  
Do I even have friends?  
It depends  
if you are asking me.  
My peers know only a rendition of me.  
An aloof me, whose only friends are baubles and pens.  
What do I know?  
It depends  
if you are asking me.  
My peers know only a rendition of me.  
An aloof me whose only friends are baubles and pens, and who doesn't know  
how to properly use her head.  
But what if you were to ask me?  
Who am I?  
I know not a rendition of me.  
I know a kind girl, with many friends, who knows to survive with only a pen.



Portrait of Adolescence, Acrylics



by Rishika Porandla, 13  
Coppell, TX

# Real Life Checkmate

by Harper Fortgang, 11  
San Francisco, CA



## *Evelyn is teased for trying to join the Boys' Chess Club*

Meet Evelyn Thompson. In kindergarten, she tore down the micro-soccer field in a dress and Mary Janes. By first grade, she could play Bach on the piano as smoothly as a river. During second grade, she smoked all the kids in her class playing checkers, and as she started sixth grade, she joined chess club.

Evelyn walked confidently through the door of the Colorado Boys' Chess Club. She didn't mind the looks the nearby boys flashed at her. If it mattered to them that a *girl* was walking through the door, that was their problem, not hers. Once the boys saw her performance, they would forget about the dividing line that existed between genders.

Evelyn soon found out she was in real-life checkmate.

When she introduced herself, Logan, a tall boy with untidy, dull-blond hair shouted, "Evelyn—what type of pretty-girl name is that?"

The other boys burst into laughter.

Evelyn sat awkwardly and tried to laugh, but only a grunt escaped. These boys had a different sense of humor, a kind that stung your heart.

Before the chess games began, Liam whispered to Evelyn, "Good luck,

powerless pawn."

He then turned toward the boys and said, "Who's going to teach Evelyn a lesson?"

Logan, the team captain, stepped forward. "I will." He mocked Evelyn by flipping his tiny strands of hair. She ignored him and made her first move: knight to c3. Logan moved his pawn to h4. The game went on and on, each grainy, wooden chess piece progressing slowly across the black-and-white board.

Finally, Evelyn called out "check-mate," certain she had proved her right to play in the chess club.

Mason raced over to her. "You're a cheater, Evelyn. Logan has never lost a game."

"Neither have I," Evelyn replied nonchalantly.

"She's a cheater. I saw her," Logan declared.

---

Later that day, Evelyn collapsed on her bed. No one had the right to accuse her of something she didn't do. Chess was about strategy, and she had simply outplayed Logan. Evelyn did not want to go back to the club—she

## *Should Evelyn run? No. She wasn't going to be intimidated.*

was treated like a mouse, and the boys were hungry cats. But, if she left this club now, these boys would know they could scare off other girls in the future. Evelyn wanted to change their minds. But how? Her eyes filled with tears, upset at the situation, and even more that these boys could make her feel this way.

---

When the time rolled around to go back to chess club, Evelyn skipped it. That afternoon, she headed out, her dog, Kaia, several steps ahead. They were walking to the park to play fetch and then to drop off a weekly meal—lasagna—for Mrs. Gates.

As Evelyn was about to throw Kaia's ball, she spotted that head of untidy, dull-blond hair. *Uh-oh. Logan.* Evelyn dropped the ball she was holding and pulled Kaia in the other direction, but it was too late. Kaia was already barking at Logan's Labrador.

Logan looked up and recognized Evelyn immediately. *What bad luck.* Logan waved—a surprising gesture given what he'd done to her in chess club. He started walking toward Evelyn, his Labrador now headed for Kaia, Kaia headed for his Labrador. Big mess. Dogs barking. Should Evelyn run? No. She wasn't going to be intimidated.

"Hey," Logan said. "Why weren't you at chess club today?" *The answer was so obvious—why didn't he under-*

*stand?*

"Why would I go to chess club and tolerate your awful behavior? I didn't cheat, which you already know!" Evelyn shouted.

"Uh . . ." Logan stammered.

"Why did you treat me that way?" Evelyn snapped.

"Look, I used to be a loner. No one liked me, so I started acting like the others. I don't know how the boys would react if I stopped teasing you; they might kick me out of the club. I have to be like them," Logan said.

Evelyn looked Logan up and down. He seemed truthful. She was quiet for a moment before speaking.

"It sounds like we're both unhappy in chess club. But you can't treat me like that, not even if all the other boys in that room will hate you." She then tried a different move. "Maybe we can team up."

Logan's eyebrows shot up. "You're crazy. How can we do that?"

"We just have to think about this as a chess problem."

The two began to brainstorm. Evelyn was certain they would find a solution.

On the way home, Evelyn was hopeful and even excited. She was so focused on chess club that she forgot to drop off the lasagna dinner—and received a phone call from a very unhappy Mrs. Gates.

---

It was time for chess club again, and Evelyn's stomach was twisting harder than ever before. She looked at Logan. He looked at her and nodded. Her throat clenched. But then she imagined a new sign hanging above the chess club's door that read: Colorado Boys' and Girls' Chess Club.

Evelyn started: "I'm here to do the same thing as you, play chess. We all deserve to be on this team, but it doesn't feel like a team . . ."

"It isn't a team, powerless pawn," Liam interrupted. "We're the kings, and we rule." He cracked up, and Hugo high-fived him.

Evelyn was about to continue when Logan jumped in. "What's the problem with having Evelyn in our club?"

"She belongs on a girls' chess team; we don't need her help," Ben said.

"Chess isn't won just by a king or a queen. You have to use all of your pieces. Don't we want to be the best team possible?" Evelyn shot back.

Logan stepped to Evelyn's side.

Mason glared at Logan. "Why are you supporting Evelyn?"

Logan responded, "How many of us have felt different and decided the only way to be liked is to blend in and exclude others from the group?"

An awkward silence followed while the boys pondered this idea.

"That happened to me," Hugo whispered.

"Me too," Ben piped in.

"Me three," Liam said, nodding.

"Exactly," added Evelyn. "While I'm a girl, we all share a love of chess. Let's not be players in someone else's game."

"Good point. We're sorry, Evelyn. I think you got the worst treatment out of anybody that's ever joined the chess club," Ben admitted. The boys were starting to move out of their boxes.

Logan and Evelyn gathered everyone in a circle to share their best chess tips. Over the next two weeks, Evelyn received apologies from each member of her team.

---

One month later. National Chess Championship Tournament. Chicago, Illinois.

Evelyn and Jonah, last year's chess champion, were finishing the definitive match. Everyone gathered around, picking a side. Evelyn was getting tired of moving her chess pieces back and forth. She had to admit: Jonah was a strong competitor. She didn't give up, though, and that was when she saw her queen's winning move.

Before she could declare victory, her entire team shouted: "Checkmate! Evelyn wins." The Colorado Boys' and Girls' Chess Club had won first place. They roared with excitement.

"Nice job, queen," Liam said. Evelyn broke into a full smile, bubbling with excitement. Her teammates hoisted her above their heads, chanting her name as loudly as they could.

Evelyn realized that she had the power to make significant change, and she knew chess was only the beginning.





The Witch, Cloth, paper, chalk



by Ava Shorten, 9  
Mallow, Ireland

# Elana (Part Two)

## A Novella

by Hannah Nami Gajcowski, 9  
Bellevue, WA



You can read the first installment of Hannah's novella, which placed third in our 2019 book contest, in the April 2020 issue of Stone Soup. The final installment will appear in our June 2020 issue.

### CHARACTERS – *In order of appearance*

ELANA (Uh-LAY-nuh) *A young furow girl who is the Chosen One*

MS. SMIT *Elana's science teacher, who later reveals a secret identity*

HENRY *A tiny, green-haired fairy who guides Elana*

CASEY FLUMPTON *An evil rock star and Elana's mortal enemy*

ASTREA, DANIEL, HERA, ALLEN, and SOPHIA *Henry's friends*

TWEETLE and TWOOTLE *Casey's messengers*

TOONA *A Neptune devil*

MRS. RICHARD *Elana's writing teacher*

MOM, DAD, MARY, DAISY, JOHN, FIONA, and EDGAR *Elana's family*

KĀLEKA CAKE (Kay-LEE-kah), TAFFY CRUSTULUM, MEL LIMBUM, SUGAR SWEET, CHOCOLAT TREAT, COCO SCALERISQUE, and VANILLE GLAÇAGE *Gingerbread workers in the Palace of Honey*

GALETTA *A snappy owner at a bakery in Sugar Top*

BUBBLES, GUMMER, LICORE, and CHOCO *Workers at the Background Theater*

SPOTS *Coco's pet dog*

PRANKSTER *Vanille's pet cat*

HALLOWEEN and EASTER *Bubbles's pets*

FILLINUS *The ambassador of light*

HAU'OLI *A girl who befriends Elana in Casey's palace*

PHILADELPHIA *Hau'oli's pet rat*

CAPTAIN HAWKINS *The police chief*

MR. REMY and MR. SAGARD *Two police officers*

## VI (continued): The Background Theater

At the end of the hallway was a theater, but without any seats for an audience. Instead, on stage, everybody was creating beautiful sets. There was everything from fancy houses to beautiful landmarks and unforgettable natural scenes. Elana stood amazed. She had never seen such beautiful backdrops! She looked at Henry, smiling, then noticed that Henry looked completely dazed and unresponsive, which puzzled Elana. What was wrong?

Suddenly, all the gingerbread artists scurried over to Henry. "Henry's sick!" one of them cried out in despair.

During the commotion, Elana had wandered over to the sets. Suddenly, there was a deafening crash. To Elana's horror, she had spilled a paint bucket onto a drying masterpiece! Everyone's attention suddenly turned to Elana. She turned red.

*What are they going to do to me?* Elana thought to herself. Just then, an angry gingerbread confronted her.

"What did you do to my masterpiece?" he shrieked. Elana looked at Henry helplessly. She wished Henry would help her. She was confused.

*What happened to Henry? What was going to happen? Will I ever get back into the cozy hotel room? What am I going to say?* Elana thought frantically.

Then she thought about the Palace of Honey. She thought about how everybody there knew Henry. Even a gingerbread here had cried, "Henry's sick!" Suddenly, a plan formed in her mind.

"I'm friends with Henry," she

shouted.

"You're friends with—?" the gingerbread man started.

"Henry," Elana finished. Everyone just stared.

"I really am!" Elana continued.

"What's your name?" A gingerbread woman asked.

"Elana," Elana said. Everyone gaped at her. "Uh—" Elana paused. "What's the big deal?"

"Well, the Chosen One is Elana," said a slim gingerbread man with a fake smile, "but I had no idea she was such a cute little chubby-cheeker."

"Well, that's me," Elana admitted, ignoring the gingerbread man's name-calling. *What is he talking about?* Elana thought to herself. *I don't even have chubby cheeks!*

"So you're the one that Henry was talking about!" said the angry gingerbread with the wrecked masterpiece, who suddenly seemed more friendly.

"So, what's your name?" Elana asked the gingerbread, changing the subject.

"Gummy, but call me Gummer—I like that better."

"Bubblegum. Bubbles for short," a gingerbread woman said.

"Licore," another gingerbread man introduced himself.

"Choco," (pronouncing it *Choe-coe*) the slim gingerbread said, then chuckled and added, "you cute little chubby ittsy-poo!"

Elana tried not to glare at Choco, because she felt awfully annoyed. She quickly felt better when Bubbles gave her an *I-know-how-you-feel* face and understanding nod.

"Is that all?" Elana asked.

“Yes, Coochi-poo,” answered Choco. Elana was burning with annoyance. She was sick and tired of being called names and so confused by what was happening to Henry. She felt like shouting out to Choco how horrible she thought he was—you skinny, fake-smiling, name-calling cookie!—but she knew it wasn’t right. Her mind was bursting with words that she could use to describe Choco. Instead, she took a deep breath and inquired, “Henry’s sick, right?”

“I don’t know, Itsy-pie,” Choco replied, handing her a book. “This book is about paint-fainting. Read page 57 and tell us if anything is helpful.”

## VII: Curing Henry

Elana took the book from Choco’s hands. Then she flipped to page 57. After that, she began to read to herself.

### CAUSE OF PAINT-FAINTING SICKNESS

The paint-fainting sickness is caused by a chemical in heavy frosting paints; it is called Europitha (EE-rope-ee-tha). Europitha can cause fairies to become entranced and then faint after smelling the paint at least five times. The Europitha is deadly for all fairies. A chemical in fairies’ stomachs called Nishto (NISHE-too), interferes with the Europitha and makes a deadly gas.

Scientists are trying to figure out why the gas makes the fairies faint, but the mystery still hasn’t been solved yet.

Elana looked up from the book.

“Done,” she said as she rubbed her finger on a page.

“Find anything useful?” Choco inquired.

“Fairies have Nisht-” Elana started.

“Yeah, yeah,” Choco interrupted.

“That’s what I thought. Read page 58 and tell me something important.”

Elana wondered why he had said “tell me something important,” not “tell us something important,” but she obeyed Choco’s orders.

### HOW TO CURE THE PAINT-FAINTING SICKNESS

Curing the paint-fainting sickness is a very hard job. There are 53 steps in all! This is the easy way to use in case of emergency.

1. Cover your patient with a handkerchief.
2. Touch his or her throat lightly and then check pulse.
3. Rub his or her stomach gently and pat his or her head.
4. Pat his or her right thigh gently, then the left.

**WARNING:** Don’t cradle your patient during the operation. If needed, put your patient on a table to help them balance.

“Done,” Elana whispered, because Licore had fallen asleep due to boredom.

“Good, Choochie,” Choco whispered back. “Tell me what to do and I’ll do it.”

Elana gritted her teeth. *I thought you would stop calling me names*, Elana thought. *I’m in fourth grade, you know. Or maybe you don’t know.*

“I can do it myself,” Elana said,

folding her arms.

"Fine, Chubby-poo," Choco said carelessly.

"Where are the handkerchiefs?" Elana questioned.

"What!?!? It's not the 1950s," snorted Choco, who very much disliked old-fashioned customs.

"Handkerchiefs were common in the 1800s through 1900s," Elana pointed out.

*She'll probably win a million dollars on Sugar Top's Got Talent for arguing, Choco thought.*

"Okay, you're right, Coochie Cutey," he responded in a *you-may-think-you're-smart-but-I'll-get-you-back-soon* tone of voice.

"The handkerchiefs are in the cabinet to your right," Bubbles volunteered helpfully.

Elana walked toward the cabinet hidden on the side of the stage. She pulled a handkerchief from the top drawer and returned to where everyone was waiting. Elana took one quick glance at the book, then began to wrap Henry up in the handkerchief. Then, after touching Henry's throat and checking her pulse, Elana carefully rubbed Henry's stomach and patted her head. Finally, Elana gently rubbed Henry's right thigh and then her left. Henry's eyes flickered open.

"Elana did it!" Bubbles cheered in a singsong. "ELANA DID IT! ELANA, ELANA DID IT! SHE-E CURED HENRY. WA-AY TO GO. WHO-HOO-HOO-HOO-HOO-HOO!"

And of course, Licore woke up from Bubbles's cheering.

"Whoohoo!" Gummer cheered.

Henry took one quick glance at the

book Elana had read to cure her, and she began to cheer.

Finally, Bubbles collapsed to the ground in exhaustion. Licore panted. Henry perched on Elana's shoulder, too tired to fly.

"Con-grats, Choo-chie P-ooo," Choco gasped.

"I think . . . it's time . . . to go home!" Henry suggested.

All the gingerbread nodded; their work was done for the day. Elana and Henry walked slowly out the theater door with the gingerbread dragging behind them. When they got to the EMPLOYEES ONLY door, no one even noticed the hole Elana had made.

Gingerbread recruiting would have to wait until the next day.

## VIII: Collecting an Army

When Elana awoke, she quickly remembered what had happened the previous day. Elana quietly got dressed and brushed her teeth. But, of course, Henry woke up. Once Henry was ready to start her day, Elana asked her what they were going to do that day.

"Oh, we're going to collect our army," Henry replied.

"Can we at least eat first?" Elana wailed. "We haven't had breakfast since the day you declared I was the Chosen One! Yesterday, all I had were snacks, and the only meal we had since we got here was dinner at the bakery!"

"Can't you see that gingerbread don't *really* have meals?" Henry asked in a *haven't-you-noticed-that-before* type



of voice. “They do have lunch, mostly as a break from work, but other than that they just snack. After all, their food is everywhere. In fact, in fights, they just attack by eating. Winning a fight means that they have devoured their opponent.”

“Are you telling the truth?” Elana asked suspiciously. “Or are you just making it up? Joking—that’s what I meant. Not, uh, lying.”

“No,” Henry said with a scowl. “I’m not a liar.” She was feeling a lot more irritable than usual today, after her ordeal with the paint-fainting sickness.

“No, I didn’t say that,” Elana protested. Then she added, “Can we just go?” forgetting about her hunger.

“Obviously not,” Henry answered through her gritted teeth. “You just called me a liar.”

“I didn’t say that, okay?” Elana argued, “I didn’t. I was just asking you if you were joking or not.”

Henry cleared her throat, then began. “I don’t lie. It’s true. I know that you don’t believe me, though, because of what you said.”

“I admit that I didn’t believe you,” Elana confessed. “But let’s not argue about it now.”

“Okay,” Henry sighed. “But you said you didn’t believe me,” she said in an *it-was-all-your-fault* singsong voice.

“Okay, let’s go back to the theater and recruit our gingerbread,” Elana said impatiently. Then she added, “The microphone is waiting for us; it would be marvelous to sing in the theater! Oh, how fantastic it would be if they never ran out of popcorn. Oh, Henry, you could be my harmony singer and—”

“Elana Jones Garfield,” Henry

snapped. “Stop dreaming right now because we’re here to recruit an army, OKAY?!” Elana was surprised by this rude response; only her mom called her by her middle name, and only when she was mad. Elana disliked the name a lot because, in her opinion, it sounded like a boy’s name.

“Okay,” Elana sighed while continuing to think about her imaginary scenario.

“Oh, the microphone is waiting for us,” Henry mocked.

“Grow up,” Elana grumbled as she opened the door.



Elana knocked on the doors of the Palace of Honey. No one answered. Elana looked at Henry.

“Oh, drat,” Henry moaned. “The Palace of Honey opens at 9:00. We’ll have to wait 30 minutes.”

“While we wait, I have a quick question. Are you—” Elana started, then paused. “Are you Ms. Smit?”

“No,” Henry replied. “I’ll tell you the story. No; instead, read this.” Henry waved her wand and created a book out of thin air and gave it to Elana. It was a beautiful book, silver with golden letters. It read:

**Confusion, A True Story: How to Figure Out if a Person is a Transformed Fairy**  
By: Henry Wings

## **Prologue**

A rotting log that is left alone turns into a Hallucinator. Hallucinators are a very rare species. They resemble grown-up women and men furows

and blend in with furows by finding regular furow jobs in the city.

Hallucinators can make people hallucinate by staring directly into their eyes. Hallucinators can die very quickly, though. With just a tiny shock or illness, they literally begin to shrink and fade away. They slowly become smaller and more transparent until they're gone. The bigger the shock, or the worse the illness, the faster they will fade. In rare cases, they will blow up in a burst of smoke. I knew a Hallucinator who was the mother of my enemy, Casey.

It all started with a mission to protect the world from Casey and her mom. The story about Casey's mom is going to be told right now. Sit back and enjoy! Hope you like it . . .

\*\*\*

One morning at 5:00 e.m., a 16-year-old girl named Casey Flumpton woke up with her mom, Lila Flumpton. They were on a long, evil mission that had to do, well, mostly with me.

The girl and her mom set off through the woods. Then they stopped at a small, green cottage that happened to be *my* cottage. They quietly snuck through the front door because they knew that I never lock my door. (I don't lock it because my friend, the Tooth Fairy, always comes through the front door so I can help her collect teeth and deliver money to kids.

Unfortunately, I was not at home. Casey and Lila looked through my diary and saw that I wrote about how to find the Chosen One. They

snuck away, and Lila walked to work at a school called the School of Intelligence. She was disguised as a science teacher: Ms. Smit. There, she looked for the Chosen One and put hallucinations on some kids.

That day, in "Ms. Smit's" class, a student named Elana seemed to know everything about the new subject, electricity. Almost a year ago, in my diary, I wrote that my friends and I wanted the Chosen One's name to be Elana. The Chosen One would be able to control powers, be kind, and be willing to help. Well, maybe with a bit of convincing.

On that day, to Ms. Smit's great surprise, Elana didn't budge from her seat when the bell rang. The surprise was enough of a shock to make Ms. Smit fade a little.

Then, Ms. Smit made a plan and decided to give Elana an iPad. She told her to type the emojis she liked the most. Elana did, and right after that, Ms. Smit had such a shock that she blew up and disappeared, leaving no trace behind. The emojis Elana typed were the exact same emojis that my diary said the Chosen One would choose:



So, after Ms. Smit was gone, I decided to take her place.

"Stop there, Elana," Henry instructed. Elana stopped.

"I like you, uh, story," Elana lied. She didn't like it at all; it had more than enough *private* information. Plus, Henry had forgotten all of her tabs.

"C'mon, that's what everyone

says,” Henry complained. “But I know the truth because I can read thoughts.” She tapped her temple.

At first, Elana had liked the thought that her companion could read minds, but now it was just too creepy. She needed to have some private thoughts. Elana quickly stopped herself from thinking about the topic any longer, because Henry was giving her a criticizing look.

Just then, out of nowhere, all the workers of the Palace of Honey began to march inside. When Henry saw Kāleka, she told her to round up all of the gingerbread that worked in the Hall of Honey.

A few minutes later, Kāleka returned with all the Hall of Honey workers trailing behind her. All of them looked at Henry, still and quiet, like she was going to tell them something that would change their lives—and that was exactly what Henry did.

“Would you, uh, like to fight, uh, Casey with me?” Henry asked.

The gingerbread stared at her like she was nuts.

“What do ya’ mean?” Mel Limbum asked.

“I mean . . .” Henry started, then continued by explaining the story of how they were searching for Casey.

“Uh, yeah . . .” the gingerbread mumbled in a wave of unsure voices.

“C’mon, Mel,” Henry snapped.

“I can read minds, and I can tell that you’re lying.”

“Okay, okay,” admitted Mel. “But if I or anyone gets hurt, you’re the one to blame.”

“Well, no one will,” Henry snapped. “And if anyone does, I have a healing

potion that can heal and mend up to infinity furows and gingerbread.”

Elana heard some sarcasm in Henry’s voice, but no one else seemed to have noticed it. Also, Henry made “infinity” sound like a number, which it isn’t.

Thankfully, Elana got some distance from Henry because she got pushed away by the gingerbread. Henry couldn’t read her mind, but she was close enough that Elana could still hear what she was saying. As Elana walked back to the group, she decided that by reading minds, Henry was teaching Elana not to lie or say bad stuff about people.

“Any questions?” Henry asked.

“May I bring my dog?” Coco asked. “His name is Spots. I got him from a different place in Neptune, so he’s not made out of chocolate or something like that. Also, he’s really good at sniffing and catching smells. I even taught him not to eat chocolate if he sees it! Chocolate is deadly for dogs, after all.”

“You may take Spots,” Henry sighed.

“Yay!” Coco cheered.

“Oohh,” Vanille cooed. “Can I bring my cat, Prankster? I taught him whom he should trust and whom he shouldn’t trust—”

“My dog was born with that ability, silly,” Coco bragged.

“Well, Prankster can also play the piano.”

“So what?” Coco snorted. “Spots can play the recorder, flute, and the violin. Do you think Prankster has enough patience for that?”

“I’m not finished yet. Prankster can climb a tree—”

"All cats can do that."

"And get down!" Vanille snapped, ignoring Coco's comment.

"ALL GINGERBREAD AND HUMANS CAN DO THAT!"

Everyone covered their ears, so Elana did too. She felt a bit annoyed the two gingerbread kept arguing about some silly stuff that didn't matter.

"WELL, HUMANS AND GINGERBREAD CAN PLAY THE RECORDER, FLUTE, AND VIOLINE TOO!" Vanille screamed back.

"THAT'S NOT HOW YOU PRONOUNCE 'VIOLIN!'"

"WHATEVER!"

"I CAN SPEAK BETTER ENGLISH THAN YOU!"

"I DON'T CARE! ALSO, ON NEPTUNE, YOU CALL ENGLISH 'NEPTUNIUM!'"

"YOU'RE A BOSSY KNOW-IT-ALL!"

"NO, I'M NOT!" Vanille screeched.

"GUYS!" Henry interrupted. "I'll let both of you bring your pets, but only if you don't argue. Now let's go get our microphone."

The group followed Henry while Vanille and Coco, glaring daggers at each other, walked home to get their pets.



"Guys, are you ready to join our microphone?<sup>1</sup> Henry asked.

Elana snorted.

"YES!" All the gingerbread answered immediately.

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<sup>1</sup> In the code that Henry made up, "microphone" means "army," "CeeCee" means "Casey," and "attack" is "sing."

"Do you all have any questions?"

Elana added. She liked the idea of having pets during the trip. Unfortunately, Henry didn't.

"May I also bring a pet?" Bubbles asked. "Or actually, two pets? Their names are Halloween and Easter!"

"What kind of pets are they?" Henry asked suspiciously.

"A dragon and a—"

"A dragon!?" Henry interrupted.

"It's friendly!" Bubbles shouted over Henry's screaming "Here, I'll call it. Tweeeeeet!!!"

A huge dragon appeared from the skies and bowed to Henry.

"Do you need any help?" the dragon boomed. "I am Halloween. But I'm not named Halloween because I look scary. I am named Halloween because I brought all the broccoli to the children who lost theirs on Halloween."

As soon as Henry heard this, she began to pet the dragon.

"Ah-choo!" The dragon sneezed.

"I'm allergic t-to pixie dust! Ah-choo!"

"Oh, sorry" Henry replied, removing her hand and backing away slowly. "Didn't realize."

"May I go get Easter, my chick that won the grand prize at Easter for finding the most eggs?" Bubbles inquired.

"Yes, yes, of course," Henry replied.

Once Bubbles left, Henry explained how grown-up gingerbread like to be young so much that they try to act childish themselves. Also, they are known as the best pet trainers in the galaxy.

"I already know that," Elana replied. "That's all Ms. Smit would talk about when we were studying pets."

Just then, Vanille and Coco returned with their pets and a small sign each. Coco's sign was in neat handwriting that said:

Dogs are the best pets in the world! They treat you like children, which we gingerbread love. Don't get cats—they just sleep.

Elana looked at Vanille's sign, which said:

Cats are the absolute best pets in the world! They're quiet and sweet—not yappy, barky, and loud like dogs.

"Henry," Elana whispered, "come see Vanille's and Coco's posters!"

Henry, who was looking at a set in the Background Theater, spun around and gasped.

"Stop it! Prankster and Spots are both great pets, but if you fight one more time, I'll take them away!" Henry shouted.

Just then, Bubbles arrived with Easter. "We're all ready! Let's go!" Elana shouted happily.

Suddenly, everything in Sugar Top went dark. "Casey's nearby!" Henry warned. Everyone froze in fear.

## IX: The Surprise

"We need to attack!" Elana yelled desperately.

"We don't have enough wires for the microphone!"<sup>2</sup> Henry shouted back

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<sup>2</sup> Translation: We don't have enough Neptunians (i.e., furows and gingerbread) for the army!

The wind, once calm, began to howl furiously; Elana thought that it was a hurricane. Rain lashed and thunder boomed. Then lightning flashed, but it wasn't your typical lightning. It was a lightning that could blind furows and put them under an awful spell if they looked directly at it.

Elana, who was looking at the ground, could see that a message was forming on it. The lightning cast a mark right in front of her eyes. The words looked like this:

YOU WILL HAVE NO LIGHT IN  
YOUR WORLD. HAHAAAAHA!  
—CASEY

"We have to do something!" Elana shouted, blinking a couple of times as her eyes adjusted to the dark.

"Get into the boat!" Henry shouted back. "The little rowboat on the pier. Block Casey's lightning attack! Block it with your hands! Row out to sea. Talk to Casey. Be careful about what you think. Remember, she can hear minds from a mile away!"

Elana followed Henry's orders, raced to the pier, and grabbed the only rowboat, but she didn't see any oars around. Suddenly, a bald eagle swooped down.

"Stand up facing the wrong way," the bald eagle screeched. "By the way, I'm Fillinus, the ambassador of light. Call me when you need me!"

Fillinus flew away, leaving Elana even more puzzled.

*Facing the wrong way, Elana thought. The wrong way? Hmmm. Tricky. Wait! I got it! Stand up on the boat facing the opposite way that you do when rowing*



a boat!

Elana did exactly that, and a path of light lit up in front of her.

"Move it!" Elana yelled, kicking the boat in frustration. But the boat didn't move.

"Oh, that ambassador," Elana muttered. "He's such a birdbrain. I thought he was supposed to be the ambassador of light . . ."

At the word "light," the boat swiftly started to move through the path of light. Lightning flashed in Elana's direction, and she blocked it with her hands. Suddenly, the sky erupted with light. Elana suspected the ambassador had done that.

"Oh, Fillinus!" Elana smiled gleefully. "He is so smart. Now, when I call someone a birdbrain, it'll mean that they're smart. I like this path of light. It guides me through the dark—"

The boat abruptly stopped.

"Uh, light!" Elana shouted, and the boat continued along the path. Elana smiled. She felt like she was gliding toward a place that was unknown.

"Go, Elana!" a voice cheered. Elana spun around and saw Henry and the gingerbread. She waved goodbye as her boat headed away.

"We're blinded by the lightning!" Henry called and Elana froze, reminding herself that Neptune depended on her.

"Faster!" Elana shouted, but the boat didn't change its speed. "No—lighter, lighter, lighter, lighter, lighter, lighter, lighter!" The boat went faster and faster as she spoke.

"Darker!" Elana shouted over the rushing wind. The boat slowed a bit.

Elana looked ahead and saw the

path of light came to an end at a tiny island.

"Slower! I mean darker!" Elana yelled "Darker, darker, darker, darker, darker!"

The boat stopped at the small island, and Elana climbed out. The island had a wall around it and only a tiny patch of grass around the wall.

It was much brighter here than any other place Elana had seen or been. *This must be Casey's house*, she thought.

The wall was coated in pink, with high castle turrets and only blue skies above. Elana clasped her hands together; she was excited to explore the castle. Then, she felt a spark between her two hands. Elana looked down at them.

To her surprise, her hands were holding a lightning rope. Then, she had an idea . . .

## X: The Break-In

Elana swung the lightning rope under a loose stone on the castle wall and began to silently climb up. The rope was sturdy, and while she was holding on to it, she felt like she was climbing up to the heavens.

When she finally reached the top, the view was magnificent. There was sea as far as the eye could see. Sugar Top was a tiny speck in the distance. Elana dug her hand in her pocket and was pleasantly surprised to find there was a sandwich and a piece of cookie in it. She didn't realize how hungry she had been and ate them while enjoying the view. Once finished, she swung

down the lightning rope and climbed down, landing on a patch of grass right behind a moat.

Elana wondered how she could break into the castle. She finally decided to swim.

Elana, unfortunately, did not have a bathing suit, so she gathered a bunch of lightning rope and began to weave one. Then she made a sack so she could carry her normal clothes. Elana looked up at the lightning rope on the wall. She didn't want anyone to catch her, and the rope was plain evidence that she had been there.

She quickly changed into her bathing suit, put her old clothes into the bag, and tied the lightning rope around it, sealing it closed. Then, trying not to make a big splash, she slipped into the water.

Elana wished she had brought goggles since she couldn't see a thing with her eyes closed; plus, she kept bumping into patches of seaweed. When she came to the surface to breathe, she saw a crocodile a couple of feet away. It was enormous, and Elana dived back into the water, so scared that she forgot to shut her eyes. Her eyes stung in the murky water.

Suddenly, a bright yellow light came from her eyes and blocked out the water. Elana was shocked, but then remembered the story Henry asked her to read. She realized that the yellow light was one of the powers Henry had given her! It felt like someone had fastened yellow goggles on her eyes.

Elana could still see the crocodile. It was even closer now, and it was ready to strike. She swam her fastest (and splashiest) stroke: freestyle.

Elana's arms were working faster than ever. When Elana got to the other side of the moat, she climbed on shore as fast as she could, ran to the side of the castle, and changed her clothes. When she was done, she stuffed her bathing suit into her bag.

*Now, Elana thought, comes the tricky part.*

Elana saw an open window. She slowly crept toward it and peered inside the room while hanging outside the window, keeping herself covered. There was a small desk, a chair, and a bed inside.

"BOO!" Two little boys jumped out of a small closet, looking around the room suspiciously.

"I thought I heard Casey coming," one of them whined.

"Yeah, Tootle. Me too," the other boy replied.

*These must be Tweetle and Tootle, Casey's messengers, Elana thought. I wonder how I'll get inside.*

Elana was thinking so hard about how to get inside that she didn't hear Tootle remark, "Maybe she's under the window."

Tweetle and Tootle walked over to the window. When they saw Elana, they yelled in unison: "INTRUDER!"

Elana needed to think of a plan, and quick. One soon formed in her mind. She stood up.

"Hello!" she said in a pleasant voice.

"Are you Nostril Spit?" Tweetle asked.

Elana didn't like the name very much, but she had to get inside as fast as she could.

"No," she blurted out nervously,

realizing soon after that she should have said “yes.”

“Casey calls you Nostril Spit because your boogers look like spit,” Tweetle explained. Twootle clamped his hand over Tweetle’s mouth.

“We’re not supposed to tell her that, Bigmouth,” Twootle hissed. He uncovered Tweetle’s mouth.

“So you must be Maryell,” Tweetle corrected, smiling his biggest, cheesiest smile.

“Blackbird singing in the dead of night,” Twootle sang.

“Why do you sing that song when I smile?” Tweetle questioned.

“Because your smile’s cheesy, and blackbirds are cheesy,” Twootle replied. “For example, blackbirds eat beetles, and beetles made that song.”

“It’s ‘The Beatles,’” Elana muttered, “B-E-A-T-L-E-S.” She was confused and exasperated by their silly dialogue.

“Oh,” Tweetle and Twootle commented, not really listening.

“And yes,” Elana continued, remembering what Tweetle had assumed, “I’m Maryell.”

“Okay, c’mon in then,” Tweetle exclaimed. “Jump in through the window!”

Elana slowly climbed through the window. Inside, it was hot and humid.

“Casey’s waiting for you in the dining room,” Tweetle explained. “You’re a bit late to see her.”

Elana was glad that the twins had not noticed her red hair. They might have figured out that she was trying to stop Casey from stealing all of the world’s light. When Elana exited the room, the air was very fresh and crisp, just like in Sugar Top.

Casey was lying lazily on the couch.

“You’re late,” she bellowed in a monotone voice when she heard Elana’s footsteps.

“I would like to request—” Elana started, but was interrupted.

Casey glanced at Elana and started to yell orders. “INTRUDER! Someone get her into the dungeon!”

Tweetle and Twootle ran right up to Elana and grabbed her by the arms. They didn’t even stop to ask why Casey was putting “Maryell” in jail.

Elana tried to stay put, but the twins began to pull her, and they were surprisingly strong. They were able to handcuff her and drag her down, down, down the stairs until they reached a cramped cell filled with Elana’s friends, including Henry, plus some gingerbread and animals she recognized. She was surprised to see them, but figured Casey had managed to capture them.

Twootle grabbed a key from his pocket and unlocked a lock on the side of the cell. He opened the door and pushed Elana inside. After locking the door, he carelessly threw the key onto the floor, and then Tweetle and Twootle walked up the stairs arguing about putting “Maryell” in the cell.

## XI: Breaking Out

Elana looked at everyone who had been captured by Casey. They were weak, tired, and hungry. Elana started to get hungry too.

“Let’s get outta here,” she whispered to them all.

Henry, the gingerbread, and animals looked up at her.

"No!" Henry responded. "I want to stay here."

Everyone else murmured in agreement.

"But, but . . ." Elana stuttered in confusion.

The ambassador of light gave her a *please-we-don't-want-to-go* face. Elana looked at all of her friends. *Had they been hypnotized?* she wondered. *Yes, that must be it! It had to be. It's the only way they would want to stay in Casey's cell.* Elana came to the grim conclusion that now she was on her own.

But Elana had never really been on her own. Yeah, she had gone on the boat by herself, but that was for a short period of time. Plus, the ambassador of light must have been leading her the whole way.

Elana noticed that she was the only one with handcuffs. And she realized no one else was willing to open the lock because they were under Casey's spell! Then Elana had an idea. She remembered how she had used her lightning rope to climb the wall. She wondered if she could make two lightning ropes at a time. She tried claspings her hands together like people do when they plead, so she could make some rope appear again. It worked! One rope sprung from each hand. With some difficulty, Elana used her mouth to make a loop around each of her handcuffs, then tied the knots as strongly as she could at each end.

She lifted her hands so that the other end of the ropes went into her mouth. She bit the ropes tightly and then pulled her hands away, jerking

them back as hard as she could. Elana thought that her teeth would fall out, and then, SNAP! The rope had so much magical strength that the force broke the handcuffs from Elana's hands. She was free!

Ignoring her sore wrists and teeth, Elana reached through the bars to grab the key. When Elana's friends realized what she was doing, they all began to pull her wrists to hold her back. Elana tried to kick everyone, but then remembered they were still her friends; they were just under Casey's orders. Elana knew the key was just outside her cell, so all she needed to do was keep reaching her hand out.

Elana pushed her arm forward while the others tried to pull it backward, but she was finally able to grasp the key. The force was so strong, Elana couldn't take it much longer. The key slipped out of her fingers and fell to the floor. Her friends gave each other high fives, and some even stood up to do a jig.

Maybe if she distracted her friends, she could get the key. She noticed they were all blind from the lightning, except for the ambassador of light. When she saw a mouse scurrying inside the cell, Elana knew this was her chance.

"Ambassador!" she yelled. "There's a mouse over there!"

The ambassador's stomach began to rumble since he was very hungry. He began to eat the mouse she had found; she knew that this might be her only chance to escape. Quickly and quietly, she grabbed the key. As she turned the lock, she heard the ambassador finish his meal. She pushed the

cell open, locked it with the key, and put it in her pocket.

Elana smiled to herself. She was free! She searched around the dungeon for the stairs, but they were nowhere to be found. Elana started to panic. There wasn't any way out, and by now, her friends had begun to shout that she had broken out!

Elana frowned. She had come so far! She glared at each wall as if to say, *You should let me out.*

As she glared at the last wall, she spotted a very high panel that seemed to hide something. It had two handles, and a Master lock held them together. Elana, thinking quickly, made a lightning rope appear, tied it to the Master lock, and began to pull and pull and pull. Sadly, the lock was too strong, and Elana's lightning rope snapped right after her third pull.

*I got so far, she thought. I got onto the boat, I took the ride here, I tricked Tweetle and Tootle pretending to be Maryell—wait what did I do before that? Oh, yeah, I climbed the wall—*

Elana spotted a crack at the top of the panel. She knew exactly what to do. She would make a lightning rope to climb the wall. Elana quickly created it and threw it over the panel and into the crack at the top.

"Good thing I have good aim!" Elana grinned and tied the rope down and climbed up to the crack. Elana stomped her foot on the panel and glared at it. She realized that being close to the panel didn't solve everything; she still had to open it. *Why hadn't she thought of this problem before?*

A razor-sharp knife magically emerged from the sole of her shoes.

Elana was astonished; she'd almost forgotten she had magic powers! She grabbed the knife and cut a bigger hole in the wall. Soon, the hole could easily accommodate her head. Elana kept cutting, and two minutes later she could fit her whole body in. Elana slowly lowered herself down and pulled the rope after her, then crept up the first flight of steps.

## XII: Dress Up

Elana ran up the stairs and out of the dungeon. She knew that any moment now she could bump into Casey or run into Tweetle and Tootle, or any of Casey's other house staff. Elana wanted to bump into someone who didn't know her. A plan formed in her mind. *She could disguise herself as one of Casey's house staff!* She was about to make lightning rope to weave a disguise for herself when she realized the dress she was wearing was yellow and her lightning rope was yellow too. They'd recognize her because everyone had seen her wearing those colors before.

Elana fished into her pocket to see if there was some paint or anything else she could use to change the color of her lightning rope, but there wasn't anything except another sandwich and a cookie.

Elana realized she had already eaten the same meal for lunch. She fished in her pocket to see what else was there, but there was nothing except a small red stone. Elana was so intrigued by the mysterious doubling of the sandwich and cookie that at first



she didn't notice Twootle marching down the hall. Luckily, Elana heard his footsteps approaching and ducked behind a big potted plant. Twootle clumsily bumped into the potted plant and marched away.

Elana realized she needed to find a room with clothes she could wear. So she walked along the hall, peeking into every room she saw. Elana had forgotten about the mysterious doubling of stuff in her pocket until she put her hand inside and found the curious-looking red stone and a double of the cell key where she had been locked up—alongside the original key!

Elana remembered reading a book that described an ancient, rare magical stone. When it came in contact with an object, it would double it. She suddenly realized that the red stone in her pocket was a doubling stone! Elana was a bit suspicious. She had no idea how the stone had gotten into her pocket. *Could someone have put it in there?* Elana thought. *No, it couldn't be. I would've noticed it. Someone must've used magic to do it. But why? And who?* She pondered this for a moment. *It must be because someone wanted me to have enough food through these days. After all, doubles of sandwiches and cookies kept appearing in her pockets. But who would do that? It sounds like something Henry would do, or maybe... Fillinus?*

Elana, though starting to be super excited to possess this rare item, didn't dare let a scream come out of her mouth. Everyone could've heard her, and she wasn't taking chances.

Elana soon found what she was looking for, a small room marked DRESSING ROOM. She peered inside

the small closet. There were all sorts of clothes, from rags to beautiful, but itchy, gowns. Elana stepped inside, checked the size of her own clothing, then looked through every piece of clothing in the closet, checking off a mental checklist in her head:

- Is it comfy?
- Is it my size?
- Is it good for the weather?
- Do I like it?
- Is it yellow?
- Is it easy to walk in?

Elana went over the checklist for each dress, shirt, pair of leggings, and pair of shoes she saw until she found an outfit that was just right. It was a blue dress that had flowers all over it, light-blue leggings, and a pair of black shoes. Elana put them on, then walked down the hall to find Casey with a new boost of confidence.

*... to be continued in the June 2020 issue of Stone Soup*

# To Those in a Cage

by Naomi Angel Farkas, 12  
Los Angeles, CA



Ravens were my favorite, with their midnight feathers full of mystery, dreams, and the whisper of age-old spirits.

I loved the hummingbirds beating their wings at what seemed to be the speed of sound as they sipped sweet nectar, fast and free.

Doves reminded me of all of my wishes, of peace and love, of a happy future that seemed so attainable.

Even pigeons fascinated me, the way they thrived in public places, unwilling to back down, even to humans.

Reality was a bright-blue sky.

I floated on wings made of dreams.

As I feel my dirty sneakers greet the pavement, I notice the people around me.

Somehow the pigeons on the sidewalk are freer than I'll ever feel.

The people are a cage, and I am a pitiful bird, rocking back and forth, reaching out for the comfort of a bright-blue sky that never comes.

Every step means suffocation.

I am lost. The cage doesn't notice.

But I don't notice the other lost souls either.

The cold faces that make up the looming bars of my cage and block out all else feel like strangers.

Even the ones I am oh-so-familiar with.

My mother's judging gaze, my peers who I know judge me, even my friends.

They are all strangers, surrounding me.

So I mumble "sorry" and move deeper into my cage.

I prefer the meaningless excuse of "sorry" to voicing my own opinion.

It is what people want to hear,

Expect to hear.

Saying it doesn't mean I'm "too nice for my own good."

In fact, I'm selfish.

So selfish I don't even deserve to be writing a poem about birds in cages.

Because I've never been caged.

But some people have.

This is for them.

This is for the people who create the cages.  
This is because I want them to see that they're hurting people.  
Don't you understand how painful it is?  
With every action, you place another bar of abandonment in a cage big enough to  
house millions of hurt, lonely souls.  
I know you don't mean to hurt people.  
I believe beings are good at heart.  
But we make a lot of really bad mistakes.  
We are terrible and wonderful, and these inconsistencies make up our being.

I wish I could shed my skin and human doubts and become a flying, soaring spirit  
of song, joining the birds that made their true home in the sky.  
I would fly with wings made of songs that aren't happy or sad, good or bad, but a  
hopeful sort of in-between.  
I would fly like the birds I admired so much, but on wings that remember I was  
once caged too.  
So I can fly over everyone who needs a little hope.  
So I can show them—you're not alone.  
I'd fly over everyone  
Because maybe everyone has a cage of some sort.

# Honor Roll

Welcome to the *Stone Soup* Honor Roll. Every month, we receive hundreds of submissions from kids around the world. Unfortunately, we don't have space to publish all the great work that comes our way. We want to commend some of these talented writers and artists and encourage them to keep creating.

## Fiction

Lena Aloise, 10  
Heidi Nguyen, 11  
Sienna Rapaport, 10  
Owen Von Weihe, 13

## Nonfiction

Bethany Karlinsky, 11  
Lambros Kledaras, 11  
Sheryl Xie, 12

## Poetry

Federico Lynch Ferraris, 10  
Sofia Brogan Fink, 10  
Scarlet Song He, 8  
Alyssa Wu, 12  
Lucy Zanker, 13

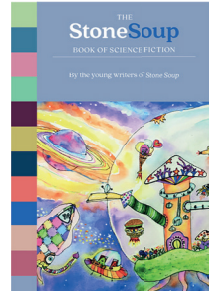
## Art

John P. Anson, 9  
Aerial Chen, 11  
Grace Williams, 12

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