

StoneSoup



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StoneSoup

*The magazine supporting
creative kids around the world*

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Editor's Note

Because of our production schedule, I am writing you this letter a few months in advance of when it will be published. It is now mid-March, and many of us are just beginning an indefinite period of staying at home as much as we can to protect ourselves and our communities from COVID-19. I tend to think of home as a magical, comforting place. But when I'm home too long, or when I'm forced to stay home, it can start to seem more like a jail than a haven.

The two short stories in this issue, both of which revolve around leaving homes and creating new ones, helped remind me of how lucky I am to still be in my familiar, comfortable home—or, as Juliet Del Fabbro writes in her poem “morning,” in “the warm calming cave / that is my bed.” And this month, the last installment of the novella *Elana* ends—like many stories—with a homecoming. We hope you have enjoyed reading about Elana's adventures!

Finally, whatever is going in the world, it is still almost summer vacation—yay! If I were a kid again, I would be spending these hot, lazy days writing, drawing, reading, and playing outside as much as possible.

Till next time,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Emma Wood".

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On the cover:
The Meeting,
Watercolor

by Keira Zhang, 10
Los Altos, CA

StoneSoup

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To the Other Side, iPhone X



by Grace Jones, 13
Santa Cruz, CA

Finding Home

by Lena Donofrio, 12
Montpelier, VT



After moving to the U.S. from Vietnam, Hoa struggles to adapt

Hoa fidgeted nervously with her brown paper lunch bag containing her turkey-and-cheese sandwich, small rounded carrot sticks, and container of applesauce that came in the drab, wrinkled packaging of a school lunch. She glanced around, feeling some kind of dread inside eat away at her stomach, her hands trembling and clutching the bag ever tighter. She was in a new, unknown land, surrounded by new, unknown people who spoke a new, unknown language.

She surveyed the cafeteria, stuffed full with bodies and chaos and noise that made her feel absolutely overwhelmed. She kept her head low and eyes pinned to the floor, focusing on just moving one foot after the other, right after left, not quite sure where she was to go. She didn't know anyone, and being the shy person she was, she shuffled over to an empty table at the back of the room and began to nibble at her food.

Hoa had come from Vietnam, a country in Asia that seemed to her to have almost nothing in common with the country called the U.S.A. where she'd moved only weeks before. She used to live with her mother, father,

little sister, and older brother in a small village near the woods. Every morning, she and her siblings would pack a bag of good homemade food and walk down the dirt road lined with flowered trees that blew in the breeze, mixing in with the aroma of soil and grass.

They'd arrive at a small schoolhouse and sit in class with children from their village and others around the area. Hoa had had a kind teacher with warm skin and a smile that ignited her eyes, who would read stories to the class all day when they did well on an assignment. She had also had friends, people with whom she could laugh and feel safe and comfortable. Of course she knew that her home country was far from perfect, but that place was her home.

When she'd had it, her life there had just been routine. It had seemed normal and not at all special. But now, she wanted more than anything to have it back. Tears welled in her eyes, which had grown hot and puffy. Now she lived with only her mother and little sister on a crowded street lined with small, squat houses that all looked identical to one another. She was shaken gruffly out of bed in the

morning, shoveled down some breakfast, and then stuffed herself into a bus near-bursting with people—loud, talking people, who smelled of breath and sweat.

After a lurching, nauseating bus ride, she would be sucked out the door by a wave of kids and washed inside a big confusing maze of hallways, classrooms, textbooks, and strangers. Her teacher seemed dry and humorless, hadn't yet made any effort to help her with English (not that she wanted anything to do with their clumsy, blundering language), and told the class that she had moved to America from *China*. Hoa couldn't really understand the words that people said around her, and she couldn't speak like them either, but she had gathered what he'd said well enough and knew very well that he was wrong. She'd come from Vietnam, not China. And, unlike in Vietnam, she had no friends.

She inhaled a shaky breath and then stuffed a baby carrot in her mouth to try and push back the wave of homesickness that arose within her. One of the only things she had left from her home in Vietnam was her name, Hoa, which translated into English as "blossom" or "flower," and her mother said she may have to lose that too, change her name to a normal American one that people could pronounce easily.

Suddenly, the despair seemed like too much to take. Vision blurred, Hoa located a door that she knew led out to the playground. As she walked slowly over toward the entrance to the outside, pushing it open, she felt invisible, like maybe if she were to just

disappear right then, no one would ever even know.

A cool breeze greeted her when she stepped onto the playground. It smelled of plants and soil, like a small pocket of home that she could never leave behind, but was at the same time tinted with the odor of gasoline, like a reminder that she was very, *very* far from that place she held so dear.

Hoa closed the door with a click, her steps transforming to a run. She ran past where the playground ended and was replaced with rolling hills and fields dotted with wildflowers. Past where a stream divided the school's property from that of the people who lived next to them, and even a little farther still.

As the wind rushed through her hair and the landscape soared by her, Hoa felt as though she could just keep running and running until the end of time, hardly even noticing as everything flew by, leaving it all behind her. Finally, her breaths coming in wild gasps, her legs collapsed beneath her.

The sun's glow bathed everything in a golden light. Trees across from the valley where she sat swayed in a gentle breeze that ruffled the daisies and wildflowers scattered about. The day seemed all around cheerful, as though everything felt the need to mock her in her misery. Bright light from above caused her to squint, as though the sun's glare were reflected back through her own gray eyes, pooling with tears of homesickness, sadness, and anger. Anger at this horrid, loud, stinky, chaotic place. At her parents, for getting into that fight that had

The tears flowed silently down her cheeks as fluffy white clouds blew over until her eyes slowly fell closed.

divided her life and family.

Hoa just sat there, reality slowly creeping up on her. For a minute, she had been caught in that wild fantasy of running in the wind and grass forever and ever, and it had felt as though there was nothing else to do, nothing else to go back for. The feeling was over all too quickly, as her limited stamina and sudden hunger hit her like a wall, sending her reeling out of the thrilling daydream and back into the real world. And though for that brief amount of time she had felt completely exhilarated, she suddenly felt guilty, thinking of her mom and sister who would be waiting for her at the end of the day.

Hoa glanced around the field where she'd stopped. She had run for some time, and suddenly had no sense of direction. All she could see were fields and gentle hills in every direction, except for in front of her, where the grasses transformed to trees and continued that way for a little while. She could hear cars zooming by on a highway, but this was no surprise, for there seemed to be highways everywhere in this place.

Hoa exhaled, trying to calm herself down after a day of stressing about everything. She lay down on the grass, her arms and legs sprawled out, and just worried about breathing. *In, out. In, out.*

Above her, all she could see was blue sky and a few strands of emerald

grass that framed her head. Just that never-ending blue, so true and deep and real. Everything else in this place seemed so cheap and phony. There were bright colors everywhere, but their largely varying tones held nothing within them. Just a layer of peeling paint with styrofoam underneath. But here the sky extended forever, that same sky that she had with her back at her old home. The tears flowed silently down her cheeks as fluffy white clouds blew over until her eyes slowly fell closed.

Hoa had no way of knowing how long she had lain there asleep when her eyes opened again and the sky above her was the color of lavender, dappled with stars and thinning clouds. The moon was a thin sliver on the horizon behind her, and the sun sat framed by the faraway lights of a city, lavishing the western sky with its crimson glow.

The air was cool, but not quite cold enough to cause her to shiver. For a minute, Hoa had a hard time remembering where she was, inhaling the semi-fresh scent of trees and dirt, and also cars, that rode on the wind as the gears in her head rewound slowly backward, recounting the events of the previous day.

Recalling the fact that she was far from home—her house in America, that is—and her mother and sister

must be worried, and that she had no way of getting to them, made her have to fight back tears, but Hoa had done enough crying for a day. For a lifetime.

She took one last deep breath and then got to her feet, which she realized were bare in the grass. She decided she must have lost her sandals while running without even realizing it. When the wind stirred the grasses and flowers with a soft whistle, something strange happened. Hoa suddenly felt her senses sharpen, and everything seemed to slow around her. She was keenly aware of every sound, every slight motion, every grain of soil beneath her feet as they moved along, seemingly of their own accord. She could recognize every slight hue of the violet sky, feel each breath of wind fill her lungs. The gale seemed to hum with a tune she'd never heard before, yet Hoa was sure that the soft harmony had pleased her ears before. The plants all around her swayed together in a fluid dance.

Hoa closed her eyes, but her vision didn't feel restricted. She could almost sense everything surrounding her, and for the first time in a while she felt completely at ease. This was the same sky she had always known, the same sun, same moon. The soil, grass and flowers seemed to greet her like old friends, and Hoa just knew she would never be alone.

Her steps came to a stop and her eyes peeled open as the enchanting feeling left her. She was greeted by the sight of her school, and Hoa had never thought she'd be more grateful to see a building. Her impulse was to take off at a run toward it, but she stopped. She

already missed that feeling, like she was connected to so much more than just herself while at the same time being so much more connected to herself than she had ever been before. The faraway trees outlined by the rapidly retreating sun looked mysterious, and suddenly enticing. She took a step in that direction, then stopped, glancing back toward the school.

Hoa wasn't sure what she wanted. The whole day her conscience had been swaying back and forth like the ocean tides, unforgiving and unpredictable. But now she actually needed an answer, and it was a hard question she was faced with. *What was it she really truly wanted?*

Taking a deep breath and turning to face the rolling fields, Hoa wasn't quite sure what had come over her in that moment right then as she straightened her spine, but she was getting quite used to the feeling. She now felt a certain familiarity to this place, this strange language, these strange lands. She felt different—like if her mother had asked her yesterday how her day was, she would have just given a brief reply and kept it all to herself, but now she was ready to share everything.

But before she turned and walked back toward the schoolhouse, she surveyed the fields for one last long moment, listening to that song on the wind, however faint it now was. She lowered her head in a bow, and whispered one soft word. She had not been taught the language of this place, yet the English word floated out of her mouth easily. "Thankyou." And though she spoke quietly, Hoa knew

that the wind would catch that word in its many coils and carry her gratitude across the landscape for all who listened to hear.

And then she turned back toward the school and walked down the gentle grassy slope. She did not know the way to their small house by heart, but she knew her feet could guide the way.

"I know what I want." Though her voice was still quiet and shy, and her English, though suddenly fluent, was accented, the words carried a certain confidence with them as though for once they were sure of something. "I want to go home."

And with that, Hoa strode into the playground, her bare feet leading her closer to her destination, as though being pulled by a string. The grasses swayed like they were waving goodbye, dancing to the rhythm of a song they all knew at their very core, carried by the wind. As the sun's last light melted into shadow, she walked into the night, silhouetted by the light from a crescent moon, that very same crescent moon that had garnished the sky every night in Vietnam.

Hoa's steps grew quicker as she continued, eager to get to where she was needed before she could rest. She didn't yet know this labyrinth of streets, but she knew one thing for sure. She was almost home.

My Journey in the Curtain

by Anya Geist, 13
Worcester, MA



To protect themselves from Hitler, Ayden's family must split up

MARCH. MARCH. The sounds and sights of the dozens of uniformed men who walked beneath our fourth-floor apartment were tormenting. The street, located in a nice part of Warsaw, Poland, used to be so pretty. Flowers would bloom in the spring, and in the summer we would play on the stoops. In autumn, the leaves would dance to the ground in the crisp air. In winter, the snow came. It fell in beautiful heaps, covering the frozen ground.

Now it was spring. The street was drab and ugly, and Hitler's flags hung from every building. I ran to the window, my three sisters flocking behind me. I poked my head out the window.

"Who're they?" I wondered of the men on the street.

"Ayden! Get away from the window!" Papa snapped in a low, urgent voice.

"Why?" I wondered. I was only nine then.

"Just do it." My sisters and I pulled away from the window.

"How about the four of you go to your bedroom. Bring a game," Mama suggested. "But stay there. Papa and I need to talk." I groaned. It was awful

to have to share a room with three younger sisters, and my parents had been promising that we would move. At this point, however, it was impossible for Jews like us to move anywhere. We reluctantly went into the room and shut the door.

We were in there for the majority of the afternoon. We tried eavesdropping, but it was to no avail. Eventually, Mama and Papa came to let us out. Over the supper table, we learned of the news that would change our lives.

"Ayden, Rachel, Leah, Sarah," Mama said. "We have something to tell you."

Papa continued. "Hitler is making it unsafe for us here. We must leave. And to do that, we must split up."

His words pounded in my head like a gong. *Unsafe? How could we be unsafe here, on this street where I'd lived my entire life? How could we split up? Where would I go?*

"Mama and I are going someplace safe, but we can't tell you where. Girls, we are sending you to friends in England. Ayden, we must smuggle you to Switzerland . . ."

Switzerland? Why did I have to be separated from my sisters? How would I



Lights of Festivity, *Canon PowerShot G7X*



by Anya Geist, 13
Worcester, MA

survive? The table swirled in front of me, and Papa's voice became muffled.

"... in a curtain. Understand, Ayden?"

"What?"

Papa pursed his lips the way he did when he was annoyed. "A curtain. We are smuggling you to Switzerland in a curtain. An old friend of Mama's works on a train. We are going to wrap you in a curtain. Then we are going to put you and the curtain into a crate. You will go with the cargo on the train. Mama's friend will watch you. She will get you to a safe place."

Papa spoke slowly and in short sentences to soothe me. Mama rubbed my back, and gradually my shortened breaths lengthened to normal. Still, I blinked back tears and tried to swallow. "When?" I managed to choke out.

Papa and Mama exchanged a glance, as if they knew their next words would break me. "Tomorrow afternoon," Mama said softly.

I began to sob, wiping my tears on the rim of my shirt. *Tomorrow? No! I couldn't just leave my home like that!*

I don't remember the rest of that night—my sisters breaking down as well—but the next morning we all woke on the couch with red-rimmed eyes.

Papa tried to make the morning cheerful, saying that since we were leaving, there was no need to ration the food in the pantry, while Mama went to talk to her friend on the train. We had an excellent breakfast, but none of us could hide the fact that we could hardly bear to go.

Just past noon, my sisters left. Papa and Mama told me to say good-

bye quickly, and then Rachel, Leah, and Sarah, with Mama to accompany them, were gone.

I wanted to cry, but there was no time. Papa pulled down the curtain over the sitting room window and wrapped me in it. He threw me over his shoulder, and we left the apartment. All I had with me were the clothes on my back. In my left hand was a sandwich, and in my right, I clutched the *mezuzah* from my bedroom door: a small, ornate box containing verses from the Torah. To me, it was a sign of home, a sign that I would be reconnected with my family.

I couldn't see even the faintest spot of light through the curtain, so I only knew we had reached the train station by the *WHOOT! WHOOT!* of the train.

I felt Papa be pulled aside, and I was set down. "Ayden?" he asked.

"Yes."

"I have to go soon. Ana will take good care of you on the train."

"Okay." I tried to keep my voice level, but underneath the curtain, I was crying.

"Hi, Ayden," said an unfamiliar voice. "I'm Ana."

I was squished a bit to fit in the box, but it wasn't too bad. "Goodbye," I heard the muffled voice of Papa say, choking on his words. "I'll see you again, Ayden."

I began to shake, tears streaming down my face. *Why was this happening?* Then I was lifted up and placed on the train.

The trip took a few days. I settled into a half-awake, half-scared-to-death state for most of it, startled every time the train hit a bump or

jerked to a stop, terrified that someone would find me.

Ana slipped bread and a bottle of water into my crate two or three times a day and, as far as I know, sat by me all the time.

The only times I made noise were when I had to relieve myself. Ana would guide me to a corner, and when I was done, back to the curtain and crate. I could never see my surroundings. I never saw her face.

Finally, at some point, Ana whispered that we had arrived. I was picked up and carried to what I assumed to be outside. The sound of dozens of people talking was foreign after my days on the train. I tried to make out bits of conversation, but it wasn't Polish.

I stopped moving, and Ana started speaking to someone. "Yes, this is him," she told the person in Polish. "Ayden," she addressed me, "I have to go now." I was so tired of those words. I had gotten used to the train, and to be displaced again? My eyes felt watery, but no tears came. I wondered if I had cried so much that there were no tears left in me. Ana continued, "I'm handing you off to Mr. Berre. He and his wife will take care of you until your parents come."

"Okay," I managed.

I felt the crate be handed over, and I started moving. "We'll set you down when we get to a quieter part of the train station. Then you can get out of the box," said a man I assumed was

Mr. Berre.

The prospect of getting to be free, and stand again, was delightful, but I was ambivalent. My curtain and box had become a sort of haven that I was hesitant to leave behind. They reminded me of Papa and our sitting room. Home. I gripped my *mezuzah* even tighter. *Would I ever return?*

Mr. Berre set me down and opened the crate. I heard the top hit the ground. He carefully lifted my curtain, set it on the ground, and began to unravel it. I was expecting him to be old, with graying hair, but the face that peered down on me, the first face I'd seen since Papa wrapped me up, was more youthful, with black, moppy hair, green eyes, a crooked nose, and chiseled features.

"Hello," he said. "You must be Ayden. I'm Mr. Berre, or Elias, if you'd prefer."

"Hi," I said quietly. I wiped my face with my sleeve in an attempt to clean up and blinked fiercely, trying to adjust to the light. I tried to stand, but my balance was wobbly, and I clutched Mr. Berre for support. "Easy," he said. "Just take it easy. We've got only a little way to walk before we get on the train."

"My wife, our daughter Zoe, and I live in the country, so it's quite a ways from the center of a city like this one."

I nodded mutely as we boarded the train and sat down on the soft, red seats. I was trembling with uncertainty. My journey was over. *Now what? Would the Berres be nice? How long would*

My journey was over. Now what?

I stay here? What would my life be like? Even more, I now wondered what type of train had taken me to Switzerland. I had so many questions, but I didn't trust myself to talk. Eventually, I forced one out. "What language are they speaking?" I nodded to the people across from us, who were deep in conversation.

"French. We're in the French part of Switzerland."

"Do you speak French?"

"Yes."

"I don't. Will I learn?"

"Yes."

I nodded and leaned my head against the window, content to watch our train leave the station and the city. From what I saw, the city was large, like Warsaw. *Oh, Warsaw. Home.* I missed home. I began to shake more, rubbing my *mezuzah* for comfort.

I was so confused, so scared. *Why did Hitler not like Jews? Why did I have to leave?* Mr. Berre must have noticed my discomfort, because he spread the curtain over me like a blanket. I buried my head in it, desperate for some familiarity, even if it was the darkness of the curtain, and fell asleep.

When I woke and poked my head out from under the curtain, the view out the window was of lush grass and scattered farmhouses, all beneath a vibrant expanse of blue. It all seemed like a joke, a place being this pretty and serene when my family was split up and I had no real idea of where they were.

I turned to Mr. Berre. "Are we close?"

"Yes, it's the next stop. You were asleep for about an hour."

My eyes went wide. I doubted I had really slept for more than ten minutes or so on the first train, with Ana, and now, although I was still uncertain, I felt the most alive I had since before my last day in Warsaw.

The train rumbled to a stop in front of a platform. Mr. Berre and I stood and got off the train. Being outside was exhilarating. Fresh air, warmth from the sun, and light.

I followed Mr. Berre over to a woman with red hair and a little girl, who I assumed were his wife and daughter.

"Papa! Papa!" the little girl yelled and ran over to Mr. Berre. He scooped her up and kissed her on the forehead. "Hello, my little Zoe!"

The woman followed Zoe over. When she saw me, she grinned. Her smile was wide, and inside, I swelled with warmth. "Why, you must be Ayden! You look just like your father! We went to college together, you know. I'm Lara. Ms. Berre."

"Nice to meet you," I said quietly. A family. *A happy, whole family.* I clutched my *mezuzah* so tight my knuckles turned white.

"This is Zoe," she continued, taking the little girl into her own arms. "She's four." Ms. Berre turned to Zoe. "Zoe, this is Ayden. He's . . ."

"Nine," I said.

We walked to their cottage on the outskirts of a village. The house was small, but it was way bigger than my apartment. The Berres insisted I have their spare bedroom.

I had my own bedroom for the first time in my life. My own bedroom, only because my family was scattered to

the edges of the world. The thought hit me with a sharp pang of sadness, and I gripped my *mezuzah* again.

I had arrived on a Friday, and so I started school on Monday. It was such a relief to be safe, but I missed my family with every waking minute. I wanted to send a letter home, but the Berres said it wasn't safe. They said that Hitler could find out where I was. My inability to do anything weighed down on me like a full sandbag.

And so, for the first few months, I went to school, I learned French, and I learned how to work on the farm. But I was quiet and reserved in school, hiding behind my ever-growing brown hair. I didn't really put my heart into learning French, and every time I worked on the farm, it was so different from living in the city that I was overcome with sadness.

Summer came and went. So did autumn. By winter, I'd made some friends. We played in the snow and celebrated my tenth birthday.

Two more birthdays passed, and I would think of my family and wonder where they were and how they were doing.

Then, three weeks ago: March 16, 1942, a letter came. I was outside doing chores when Zoe came running. "Ayden! You got a letter!"

My eyes lit up as I accepted the envelope from her. I ran inside and sat on my bed, clutching my *mezuzah*, as I tore it open.

Dear Ayden,
We miss you so much! We are sorry it took this long to write, and we still cannot say where we are. Just know

that we are safe, your sisters are safe, and you are safe. We will win this war and be together again. Remember this, and be happy.

Love,
Mama and Papa

I grinned. I felt as though I were a balloon, free and light. The burden I was carrying had dissipated; I could be happy, knowing my family was safe.

I became aware of a knocking at my door. "Come in!"

Zoe burst through the door and sat down next to me, expectant. "What'd it say?"

"They're safe. My family is safe."

"Am I your family too?"

"Yes."

"What're you going to do now?"

"I don't know. Maybe I can tell you about Warsaw, if you'd like?"

"Please!"

And so I did.

Now I write down all my stories, from Poland and Switzerland. For so long, I was afraid, and inside, I'd refused to let myself leave Warsaw. Now I have decided to embrace both of my lives because they're both a part of me. And I know that I will see my family again.

Three Poems

by Juliet Del Fabbro, 11
Richmond, VA

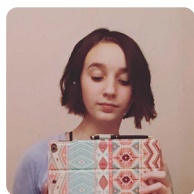


jump

my toes grip the edge
as i peer down down
into the blue hole of gloom
my heart becomes a motorcycle
running on the adrenaline
of summer adventure
wind scrapes my cheek
as my knees shake weakly
the dark swirls call me
chanting jump
pulling me with a rope
i drop



In the Wind, *iPad*



by Abigail Craven, 13
Harland, WI

summer nights

summer nights
are cool like ice cubes
melting in your mouth
stars paint the roof over our heads
rewriting the world
the breeze lays low
sneaking its way
like a serpent
parting armies of ivy
nights like paintings
the nights you'll remember

morning

the sounds of morning
greet me with unpleasant cheer
the world's awake after what feels like
years of solitude
the earth is smiling
the birds are singing
but still
i lay heavy like a log
refusing to move
things are happening
cities are bubbling
boiling with life and sound
mixing and whirring
machines go round and round
early morning adventure doesn't hit me
but the gentle sound
of rain tapping my roof
slithering down until the brown
wet muck meets it
and the warm calming cave
that is my bed
excites me the most
on this rainy
messy
saturday morning



The Little Princess, Acrylics



by Rebecca Wu, 9
Medina, WA

Elana (Part Three)

A Novella

by Hannah Nami Gajcowski, 9
Bellevue, WA



You can read the first two installments of Hannah's novella, which placed third in our 2019 book contest, in the April and May 2020 issues of Stone Soup. This is the final installment.

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*

XIII: Speaking to Casey on the Telephone

Elana knew that there was a high chance of somebody finding her. *If only I could hide my bright red hair*, she thought.

Then she came up with a great idea. She sat on the ground, made a bunch of lightning rope appear, and began to weave. Elana didn't know how to sew, but she was an excellent weaver. Soon enough, she was finished with her new work: a wig! Elana put the wig on her hair and tugged on it. Some strands of her hair peeked out, but she figured it just looked like red highlights against the wig. Elana didn't worry about her face; she didn't think anyone would recognize her.

Elana hurried along the hall and suddenly came to a stop when she saw a maid who was about her age. The girl had long, curly black hair and a patchwork dress. She wasn't looking ahead and ended up bumping into Elana.

"Oh!" the girl exclaimed in a startled voice. "Didn't see you there. Well, I thought you didn't notice me either. After all, when you get blinded by the lightning that Casey makes, you are instantly under her command. If the lightning doesn't strike you, she'll come after you and try to put you under her mind control." Elana froze as the talkative girl carelessly babbled on. "Now she's trying to get this girl named Elana in the dungeons, but she must've escaped. I mean, she's not in there anymore. Have you, perhaps, seen her? She has red hair, blue eyes, and a high-

pitched voice."

Elana froze in terror. She hoped her disguise worked. Then, using her deepest voice, she lied. "I saw her in the kitchen. She was trying to help the house staff polish the silverware."

The maid grabbed a hidden phone from her pocket and then said, "Casey, someone knows where Elana is." She paused, waiting for an answer. After a few seconds, the maid said, "Okay, okay, I'll ask her." Then, speaking to Elana, she inquired, "What's your name?"

"El—" Elana paused. *What name would she say?* Elana knew she had to think of one *fast*. Without thinking any further she blurted out, "Elmaña!"

"Do you mean *El Maña*?" the maid asked, pausing between "El" and "Maña" for emphasis. "That sounds kind of like 'the hand' in the human language Spanish," she remarked.

"No," Elana answered, lowering her voice again. "*Elmaña*," she belated a bit more confidently.

"Her name's Elmaña," the maid said into the phone. She paused again, then said, "I'll hand her the phone." Then she gave the phone to Elana.

"Hello?!" Elana called, using her deep voice. She paused expectantly.

"Can you give me some details?" Casey asked on the other end.

"Yes," Elana answered quickly, then explained. "I was there to clean the kitchen, and then I heard someone. She was dressed up in rags, and I asked her what her name was. She said 'Elana.' I asked her what she was doing in the kitchen, and she told me she was trying to surprise you by polishing the silverware."

"Why didn't you put her in the dungeon?" Casey demanded.

"I didn't know that she was supposed to be there," Elana responded, as innocently as she could.

"Okay, then. Bye," Casey answered in a *why-didn't-you-do-that* tone of voice, then hung up.

"What did she say?" The maid asked.

"Just asked some questions, and then she hung up," Elana answered.

"That means she's mad at you!" the maid explained in a terrified voice.

"Do you like her?" Elana questioned.

"Like her?!" the maid screeched. "Of course not! But that's not the point. If she doesn't like you, she'll send your most horrifying dream at you!"

Elana quickly changed the subject by asking the maid's name.

"Oh, sorry I didn't tell you that before. I'm Hau'oli (*HOW-oh-lee*); it means 'joyful' in Hawaiian. Are you . . . Elana? I remember all the names of Casey's house staff, and Elmaña is not one of them."

"Yes, my name is Elana," Elana replied truthfully. "Sorry I didn't tell you; I thought you got blinded by the light and were under Casey's orders."

"Um, no," Hau'oli replied. "I'm kinda like you—all my folks are under Casey's orders. How are your friends and family?"

"I don't know about my family, but my friends are in the dungeon," Elana replied. "Do you know why? . . . Wait! I also have another question! How did you get to talk to Casey? Because you weren't under her command? Wait! Is it okay if you answer this one too—

why were you babbling about random stuff when you met me? I could've been someone else—like Casey!"

"First I'll answer question one, and then question two, and then I'll answer question four!" Hau'oli said.

"I didn't ask four questions, I asked—" Elana interrupted, feeling confused. But Hau'oli kept talking.

"I know your parents or your siblings, though you may not have any, are not under Casey's orders because then Casey would be busy chasing your family and making them spill everything they know about you. If this were the case, when I called her, she would've screamed that she was busy, and you'd never have gotten the chance to talk to her.

"Now I'll answer the next question. I'm also disguised as a maid. When the flash of lightning came, my parents started running toward the castle—Casey's castle. You see, all Neptunians who are blinded go straight there and become Casey's servants unless Casey assigns them a mission. They get around using their other senses, particularly their sense of smell, which they use to locate the castle.

"They were really fast, and I tried to follow them. I suspect that Casey's lightning gave them some powers because they oddly ran across the water, but I couldn't do it. So I got a paddleboat and paddled after them. I watched as they shouted to one another and pointed to the castle looming in the distance. I knew I had to get in front of them if I wanted to stop them. I paddled faster and faster and was able to get to the castle before they did. By that point, stars were twinkling in

the sky. As soon as I got to the shore, I looked out, trying to find them.

"I couldn't see my parents any-more, but someone had stepped out of the castle and was coming toward me. A woman was in front of me, and she cooed, 'Come here, little girl. I'm Casey. You're probably really tired. Come here, you itsy-poo. Here's a phone; you can use it when you need me. Now, follow me.' I followed her through the door that led to the castle. I suspect Casey thought I was already blinded by her lightning and didn't notice my rowboat docked behind the brick castle wall. I followed her inside because I wanted to find out where my parents were."

"Wow, what a great tale," Elana complimented her new friend. "You told it with so much feeling." She still had tons of unanswered questions but was distracted by the magnificent story.

"Thanks, Elana," Hau'oli said, blushing. "I'm thinking of becoming a storyteller. NOT a writer. I always get an 'E' on writing and typing. But now I'll answer your last two questions. Yes, I will answer your third question, and yes, I will answer the fourth you didn't know you had."

Elana giggled as Hau'oli continued.

"I knew it was you because I purposely bumped into you. You tried to dodge me, and if you were not paying attention, you would have said 'sorry' and moved on. But you didn't. That's when I realized you had to be Elana. No one else wanders around the staff hall."

"So, do you want to attack Casey?" Elana asked Hau'oli. She had been dying to ask her that question.

But Hau'oli didn't seem to hear Elana's invitation. Instead, she was staring at a bloody, white hand that had appeared on the ground. It was Elana's worst dream . . .

XIV: Speaking to Casey Not on a Telephone

Elana froze in place. The bloody hand was moving toward her. For a minute there was a deadly silence, and then Hau'oli screamed, "RUN!"

"AHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!" Elana screamed back. "It'll chase us H-H-H-Hau'oli!"

"Trust me! I know what to do!" Hau'oli yelled.

"Then tell me and stop shouting!" Elana yelled back.

"I said run!" Hau'oli snapped, screaming even louder.

"Finnnne," Elana groaned. She wasn't very fast, but she didn't like the idea of a bloody hand chasing her. Elana ran as fast as she could and as hard as she could.

"Wait for meeeee!" Hau'oli yelled again.

Elana couldn't stop. She was running as hard as she could and didn't dare look back.

"Oh, wait! What are we running from?" Hau'oli inquired.

Elana thought that the answer was pretty obvious, but still replied: "I'm running away from the bloody hand of death—duh!"

"You're running away from a hallucination!" Hau'oli corrected.

Elana stopped and realized that

Hau'oli was right. She stepped on the bloody hand, and it felt like nothing was there. Smiling, she wiped her sweaty hands on her dress, then asked, "Now, how are we going to see Casey, Hau'oli?"

Hau'oli didn't respond. Instead, she pulled out a piece of paper, an invisible-ink marker (more on this later), a regular pencil, and a red pen. Then she began to write.

"Uh, what are you writing?" Elana asked Hau'oli.

Hau'oli didn't reply. When she was done, she gave the note to Elana, and Elana slowly read it.

THE PLAN TO ESCAPE

1. H leads E all the way to the broom closet.
2. E finds pickaxe in broom closet and breaks the wall.
3. H and E find the big pipes and crawl through together.
4. H and E meet Ph, and Ph leads the way to C.
5. H, E, and Ph plead with C to send everyone back home (if yes, stop plan).
6. Ph crawls up C's clothes.
7. C screams, "Guards!"
8. H, E, or Ph attack and throw guards in prison whenever they arrive.
9. H crawls up behind C, then jumps on her.
10. Ph tickles C.
11. E threatens C.
12. C gives up.
13. Everyone asks C AGAIN to send us home.

There was a big blank space at the

bottom of the list. "The rest is in invisible ink," Hau'oli explained as she handed Elana the invisible-ink pen. This helps us keep our plan secret. "The pen has a light at the end so when you shine it at the invisible writing you can read what it says."

Elana took the pen from Hau'oli and read the invisible part of the plan:

Key:

H = Hau'oli

E = Elana

C = Casey

Ph = Philadelphia

"Done!" Elana exclaimed. "But who is Philadelphia?" Elana asked.

"I'll tell you later," replied Hau'oli. "For now, follow me."

Elana followed Hau'oli through the halls, occasionally bumping into some of Casey's supporters, who mistook them for other supporters.

Then, Hau'oli stopped so suddenly that Elana almost fell on top of her. There was a small, crooked door in front of them. Hau'oli heaved the door open with such a loud groan that nearby staff stared at them.

"Casey wants me and Hau'oli to grab one of her threading spools," Elana explained to the people staring.

"There are no threading spools in the broom closet!" one of Casey's house staff protested, but Elana and Hau'oli were already inside.

"Is there anything in here?" Hau'oli inquired.

"I can't find anything useful like the—wait, what's on the list again?" Elana questioned. She heard the wrestling of Hau'oli pulling out the paper.

"We need to find the pickaxe," Hau'oli said determinedly. "Wait, is that the pickaxe?! No, no, no!" Hau'oli said, frustrated. "That's a spatula!"

"Do you need my lightning rope?" Elana offered.

"No, no, no . . . wait, WHAT?! You have lightning rope?" Hau'oli exclaimed. "I heard that it's very rare nowadays."

"I just create them with my hands. I called them lightning ropes, but they may not be lightning ropes."

"Create them now so I can see them!" Hau'oli demanded.

Elana clasped her hands together and created one very long lightning rope.

"That's what I'm talking about!" Hau'oli exclaimed again. "I've only seen it in photos, but I've never seen it in real life. It's . . . it's beautiful!"

"I've never heard of it before," Elana said. "But you seem to know a LOT about it."

"My teacher just kept going on and on about it . . . I nearly fell asleep until she said it was very precious and showed us a lot of photos."

"So you don't really know anything about it?" Elana asked.

"Yeah. Only that bit of information," Hau'oli admitted. "Let's just forget about it. Now, where's the pickaxe?"

"Oh, where do you usually find the pickaxe?" Elana inquired.

"It's usually in the corner, behind the broom," Hau'oli answered.

Elana checked behind the broom.

"There it is!" she sighed in relief. "I thought we'd never find it."

"Good," Hau'oli said. "Now it's time

for the next step. Let's go through the portal and meet Philadelphia."

"Who is Philadelphia anyway?"

Elana pressed again.

"It's my pet rat!" Hau'oli explained cheerfully.

"Ugh. Rats are disgusting," Elana responded, wrinkling her face.

"Actually, I think all rats are cute," Hau'oli said defensively. "Besides, some furows have rats as pets."

"Um. Okay," Elana agreed reluctantly, trying to be polite. "Should we meet her, then?"

"Yeah, she's a very nice rat," Hau'oli said, nodding. "She's also a talking rat. Not many of them talk nowadays, right?"

"Are you joking?" Elana shrieked. But Hau'oli had already grabbed the pickaxe from her and started pounding on the wall.

"Wait, wait, wait, wait, wait, wait, wait . . ." Elana yelped. "Isn't there a different way? You seemed to already know Philadelphia, and there's no hole in the wall because if you met Philadelphia inside, there'd already be a hole in it!"

"She went into hiding when Casey saw rat hairs all over her dress. Last time, I saw her in a different place. And she said that Casey had found her rat hair, so she's hiding in this broom closet." Hau'oli banged the pickax harder. "Now, no more questions! Let's get back to work."

"What am I supposed to do?" Elana questioned.

"Just a second," Hau'oli replied. "Just a sec, just a sec . . . Be patient . . . There!" Hau'oli sat back, admiring her work. There was a huge hole with a

rat sleeping inside. "Oh, Philadelphia!" Hau'oli called in a sing-song voice. The rat woke up.

"Hello!" she squeaked. "What can I do for you, Hau'oli? Oh, oh, I see you brought a friend!"

"Yes! And now we're going to attack Casey!" Elana added.

"Who are you?" Philadelphia asked.

"I'm Elana, spelled with an 'a' in the middle." Elana held out her hand to shake the little rat's paw as she introduced herself.

"Nice to meet you, nice to meet you. I'm a friend of Hau'oli. Now I'm a friend of you. Friend of Hau'oli, friend of you!"

Elana laughed.

"Soooo, do you wanna tell her the details?" Elana asked Hau'oli.

"Yeah, yeah, yeah," Hau'oli responded. "So this is my new friend, Elana, and she agrees that we should attack Casey together. Do you want to join?"

"Yes, because I'm friend of Elana! And friend of Hau'oli!"

Hau'oli picked up Philadelphia, who kept squeaking, "Elana friend, Hau'oli friend!"

"Sssshhhhh," Elana hissed at Philadelphia when Hau'oli slowly creaked open the broom closet door.

Philadelphia whispered something that sounded a lot like "Mad at friend Elana."

"Did you find what you need?" one of Casey's butlers snapped sarcastically, rolling his eyes.

"Yes, we found the one Casey needed. She said that she left it in the broom closet," Elana lied.

"Oh, well, that's good," the butler snapped again, with an *I-don't-believe-you* tone of voice. Then, whispering pretty loudly to a maid that was passing by, "I'm gonna call Casey and tell her that this girl's crazy—she's losing her marbles!"

Elana overheard that and paused, remembering that Casey was probably within one mile and so could probably read her mind. But luckily, the palace seemed to be bigger than she thought.

"Who are you?" the butler bellowed, looking directly at Elana. She knew he was going to force her to talk to Casey, and Casey was already mad at "Elmaña," so she would have to think of a different name, and fast.

"Uh, Linda," Elana lied, thinking of her Portuguese class, and how the word meant "beautiful."

"Come here," the butler commanded. "You're going to speak with Casey. You're acting odd; I'm sure she'll not approve of that."

The butler, who had been blinded by the flash of lightning, took out his walkie-talkie and dialed Casey's number before he gave it to Elana. He had mistaken her for a butler, a maid, or some other member of the house staff.

"Hello!" Elana croaked, trying as hard as she could to make a very scratchy and croaky voice. It sounded a lot like a toad would sound if it could talk.

"Who are you, and why are you speaking to me?" Casey cackled, in a now-familiar voice.

"I'm El— I mean, Linda, uh—"

"She's talking to you because I found her acting weird," the butler promptly explained. "She claimed that

you, Casey, told her that you had left your spool of thread in the broom closet. Which is *impossible*, because it's where all the house staff live—all except Tweetle and Tootle, of course."

"Uh, yeah, that's true," Elana admitted. "I'm a bit hard of hearing, so I thought you told me to get the spool of thread—"

"And I have trouble sleeping because I can't remember you coming over to talk to me today," Casey snapped back sarcastically, then hung up.

Elana took a step forward, and all the things she had done today swarmed through her mind. Unfortunately for her, that single step put her closer to Casey, and she was now exactly one mile away from her! Now Casey knew where Elana was, and she knew Elana had pretended to be two people in her house staff, and she knew about the plan Elana and Hau'oli had made up!

XV: Tweetle and Tootle Speaking to Casey

"Tweetle! Tootle! Come here!" Casey snapped. A rushing flurry of steps could be heard upstairs.

"I said, 'come *here*!'" Casey roared. Tweetle and Tootle, the twins, burst into the room, panting.

"S-so sorry!" Tootle apologized.

"Uh, sorry," Tweetle lied.

"This is the 56th time you hesitated or lied to me! As your punishment, you will go ALL BY YOURSELVES to take the rest of the light from those

Neptunians. And once you're done, you'll take the light from the Uranusians, and then the Saturnites! Then do the same thing to the Martians and then move on to the Earthlings. On Earth, start at the places with the most light, like New Pork, or New York—whatever!"

Tweetle and Tootle exchanged glances at Casey's worse-than-usual crazy outburst.

She continued, "Then move on to the Venusians, then the Mercurians. When you go to Mercury, learn the local language; they speak an Earthen language called Porean. No, no, no . . . they speak Korean. They also are the closest planet to the bunny! No, the bummy, or is it the tummy?" Casey gasped for air.

"No, that's wrong; it's the bun! No, wait, the sun!"

"Uh, okay," Tweetle replied. "Is it safe?"

Instead of answering, Casey screamed, "That's the 56th time that you lied to me, the 57th time you hesitated in front of me, the 77th time you got scared, and the 127th time you questioned me!"

Tweetle could feel anger pouring over himself. It's true that he had lied, hesitated, questioned, and gotten scared—but there were good reasons why. He was a very shy boy, and when Casey asked him to join her, he had hesitated, then stuttered the word "yes." Then she threatened him, saying he would have to take a test to prove that he was worthy of working for her, and if he failed she would blind him with her lightning. His brother didn't need to take the test because he

got blinded from the light on Casey's first mission to a small town to steal a candle. Tweetle was scared, so he hesitated at first. Then he asked in a pouting tone, "Do I have to?" Then he lied and said he was very sick, so he couldn't do the test. Casey could read minds, so she got angry with him and made him take the test three times, and he passed.

And that's how it started. While thinking about this, he thought of more and more reasons why he didn't like Casey. Mustering up all the courage he could, he shouted, "I QUIT!!!!!!"

"What?!" Casey screeched. "Y-you can't q-quit w-we—"

"That is the 14th, 15th, and 16th time you stuttered in front of me!" Tweetle glared at Casey, his voice rising, "and the 105th time you have refused to let me express my ideas. So, goodbye! See you soon! P.S., I'm off to find Elana!"

"Well, I bet you won't, 'cause now I have a plan with your brother, and you can only hear it if you unquit!" Casey roared.

Well, that is a lie, Tweetle thought. He stormed off and pretended to leave, but when Casey wasn't looking he hid under a table to hear what Casey was about to reveal to his brother.

"Now that your brother's gone, I'll explain something to you. Elana is exactly one mile away from me, so I can read her mind," Casey explained. She went on to describe what she heard. Once she was finished, she added, "Go and collect an army for me."

XVI: The Warning

Tweetle ran through the hallways as fast as he could. He greatly disliked racing against his own brother, but this was an emergency. He had heard that Elana was in the really big hall where their butlers, maids, and other house staff lived, so he had a long way to run. He also knew that he, Hau'oli, and Elana were in danger. The whole situation reminded him of a race. The starting line was Casey, who didn't want him to warn Elana. He was the racer who was going to do almost anything to get to the finish line. The finish line was Elana and Hau'oli. As he ran

up the stairs,
and up . . .
and up . . .
up . . .

he spotted an old man walking down and bumped into him.

"Easy, Tweetle," the mysterious man sputtered in a harsher voice than Tweetle expected. "Danger is ahead. Now don't rush, and remember: there is danger ahead. Password is L-I-G-H-T, Tweetle. Elana's nearby."

The old man left as quickly as he appeared. Tweetle stood frozen in place, aghast. Then he ran up the stairs while thinking, *Who was that man? And what did he mean?*

He thought about the second question. *He must think I'm trying to capture Elana. So he's telling me all the information he'll think I'll need—*

"WHOA!" Tweetle yelped as a humongous gargoyle with stinky feet jumped out at him, making him tumble down five steps.

"PASSWORD!" the gargoyle

shrieked.

"L-I-G-H-T!" Tweetle exclaimed to the creature, thinking of what the man had said.

"Correcto!" the gargoyle said, as he jumped out of the way to reveal a tiny wooden door. Tweetle stood up and ran to it.

"PASSWORD!" the gargoyle, who was blinded by Casey's light, shrieked as he thought someone new had run by.

Tweetle burst through the door, ignoring the gargoyle's screams of "PASSWORD! PASSWORD!" at his heels.

The door led to a corridor with bright sunlight but unfresh air. He pulled out a magical map that he had stolen from Casey. It had the names of her enemies who were inside the castle. Most of the names appeared to be in the dungeon, but there were three that were out and walking around the castle: Elana, Hau'oli, and himself.

He ran through the corridor as fast as he could. Then he got to a circular room with many people inside it arguing. In the center of it stood Elana. He wasn't absolutely sure it was her, but then he remembered that Casey told his brother about the wig she was wearing. He also remembered that Elana was with another young girl holding a rat. Tweetle figured that the girl with the rat must be Hau'oli, and the rat had to be Philadelphia.

He shoved his way through the bickering crowd as they became louder and louder. It sounded like they were trying to decide what to do with Elana.

"Halt!" yelled a voice. Everyone

spun around to see Casey standing in the crowd.

Tweetle knew that this was his only chance to warn Elana and Hau'oli. He ran to the center of the crowd, ignoring Casey's shouts. He heard a jumbled roar from the crowd, with Elana's name being shouted over and over again.

As soon as Elana saw Tweetle, she gasped and said, "Hau'oli, run!"

Tweetle knew he had to act quickly. He saw Elana and Hau'oli dive behind a pillar, and he dove behind too. Elana tried to make some lightning rope to tie him up, but Tweetle dodged out of the way and quickly tied Elana and Hau'oli up instead.

"Hau'oli! We need to get out of here," he heard Elana whisper.

"No, wait. Seriously, I've come here to warn you," Tweetle corrected her.

"What?" Hau'oli snapped in an *I-don't-believe-you* tone.

"Casey's after you!" Tweetle explained frantically.

"Where's your proof?" Elana asked suspiciously.

"Listen to her!" Tweetle exclaimed. "And check out my map. It shows all of Casey's enemies."

He showed Hau'oli and Elana the magic map that had their names on it.

Hau'oli and Elana still didn't seem convinced that Tweetle was telling the truth. They started to listen to Casey explaining to the crowd how Tweetle had joined Elana's team. Everyone except Tweetle gasped.

"So it's really true!" Hau'oli gasped, as Tweetle untied her and Elana.

"It is," Tweetle said. "And now we have to run."

XVII: Elana, Hau'oli, Philadelphia, and Tweetle Speaking to Casey—Not on a Telephone!

"Are we running away from Casey?" Elana asked Tweetle. "I thought we were trying to get to Casey"

"True," Tweetle admitted. "We just need to think of a plan first. Maybe we should host a meeting between us and Casey."

"Tweetle friends! Hau'oli friends! Elana friends!" Philadelphia squeaked.

"Be quiet!" Hau'oli hissed.

Philadelphia squeaked what sounded a lot like "Mad at Hau'oli friend."

"Do you have a map of the castle and all of its rooms?" Elana asked, changing the subject. "Not the one that has Casey's enemies' names and a list of where they are."

"Yes!" Tweetle replied, taking out another map from his pocket.

It looked like this:



Elana peered over the map, knowing she was going to get shoved by Hau'oli. She was right. Hau'oli shoved Elana to the side as she peered over the map herself.

"This shows exactly how lazy Casey is," Hau'oli grumbled back to Elana.

"Okay, let's stop her at the end of the House Staff Hall," Tweetle said, quickly developing a plan while biting his thumbnail.

"How are we going to get there? Casey probably already finished the meeting with the house staff," Elana wondered aloud. "And she's probably walking over there right now!"

"That's why I have a shortcut," Tweetle exclaimed, bouncing to his feet. "Follow me!" He led them to a door that had been painted red. It was very short. Elana and Hau'oli had to duck to get through the little door, but Tweetle had no problem fitting.

The doors they were going through started to shrink. They got smaller and smaller, like in *Alice in Wonderland*, until even Tweetle had to duck down to fit through them.

These doors, Elana thought, *had to be made by Tweetle himself*. After they got through the smallest door, the doors began to gradually grow bigger and bigger until they finally looked like the biggest doors Elana had ever seen.

As they walked through the last giant door and ducked under a gargoyle, the three of them came face to face with Casey!

"Well, well, well," she cackled. "Nice to see you again."

Elana discreetly pulled out the list from her pocket and, trying to clear

her thoughts, quietly motioned for Hau'oli to come over. Hau'oli came over, and they reviewed the attack plan they had worked on.

"Pppppp!llllleeeeeeeaaaaaasssss-seeeee!" Elana and Hau'oli pleaded, when they saw which part of the plan they were on.

"Please!" Philadelphia added.

"What? Guys!" Tweetle exclaimed. "This isn't part of the plan."

"You never told us the plan," Elana reminded him. "And we never said we were going to follow it."

"GIRLS!" Tweetle yelled in frustration. "They're so annoying!"

"What do you want?" Casey said, wincing.

"For you to send us home," Hau'oli insisted.

"For you to take the spell off your house staff," Elana added.

"And not to swat my family members," Philadelphia added.

"Why should I care?" Casey snorted.

Tweetle felt rage explode inside him. He couldn't help swatting Casey as hard as he could.

"Hey!" Casey shrieked. "Owwww! Stop that! Your friend is just a rat, and I don't think you've met her family members!"

"You are just a dead *furow*!" Elana yelled at Casey.

"No, I'm not!" Casey protested.

Elana ignored her protest and began to slap, punch, and kick furiously at Casey. Then everything became dark, and Elana knew what was going to happen next.

"Close your eyes!" she yelled. Everyone followed Elana's order.

Casey made a burst of lightning appear, and Tweetle remembered the time she had taught him how to get rid of it. He had to zoom up to the lightning bolt and touch a certain part of it, with eyes shut tight to avoid getting blinded. You see, when the lightning strikes, it always contains a note about Casey's thoughts. Anyone can see its reflection on the ground, so you can use the note as a map to figure out what part of the lightning bolt to touch. It's a very risky mission, and those who had tried before struggled to reach the lightning bolt, touched the wrong part, or forgot to shut their eyes.

The flying part was easy for Tweetle. The hardest part was remembering where exactly he had to touch the lightning bolt. He thought hard, and then remembered that it all depended on what month it was! Each month had a certain probability of seeing Casey's lightning. Tweetle knew it was July, and so there was a 15% chance of lightning. The "15%" is code for the 15th letter of the alphabet: O!

Now Tweetle realized he had to touch the O on Casey's note. He looked down, looking for the message the lightning had left. He hoped he would see an O—and only one so he would know exactly where to strike. The note was faint at first, then became brighter and brighter until he could clearly read: NOTHING CAN DEFEAT ME. The letter O reflected right in front of his feet!

He thought it was worth the risk, but he was scared. Casey had once said that he would get badly injured if he touched any other letter. Tweetle

took a deep breath, shut his eyes tightly, and flew up to touch the O . . .

XVIII: Apologies

Elana stood up and blinked. The lightning was still there, and she looked straight into it but still had no instinct to work for Casey. She was confused and pinched herself to make sure she wasn't dreaming. It hurt. Suddenly she started to panic. *Did Hau'oli lie about the lightning?* Elana asked herself. Horror and fear spread throughout her body. *Do I have any friends at all? Is Henry just an evil fairy who works for Casey and lured me here to destroy me?*

"Try not to think the impossible," recommended a gentle voice behind Elana. Elana spun around. A fairy with a purple shirt and—okay, you get it—was standing behind Elana. Suddenly, all her fears disappeared.

"Henry!" Elana cried. "I missed you soooooo much!"

"I'm glad you're being reasonable again," Henry said, smiling gently. "It's only been a day since I was under Casey's orders, but I guess it was half of your adventure!"

"I have a million questions for you! The first one is, who put the doubling stone in my pocket?" Elana asked eagerly.

"I did, because I didn't want you to starve."

"What about the lightning rope? How does it work?"

"The lightning rope can never be broken, and it is very rare to possess the power of creating it," Henry said with an emotionless face. Then she continued, "You have MANY powers,

Elana. You just have to work hard to find them."

Elana was surprised and shocked at the same time, but she didn't show it. Instead, she went on with her questions. "Oh, and why did you cheer me on if you were under Casey's order when I traveled to the castle on the boat?" Elana inquired.

"Because I was trying to lure you to Casey's castle so she could defeat you," Henry paused. "So I guess that part of your thought was true for a very, very short window of time," she added with a laugh.

"Where's Casey anyway?" Elana inquired again.

"In the dungeon," Henry replied.

"WHAT!" Elana shrieked. "I must've blacked out!"

"No. Your eyes were just closed. Tweetle learned how to get rid of the lightning when he was on Casey's side, and she said something bad would happen to him if he touched the wrong letter—and he did."

"What happened to him?" Elana gasped.

"Well, if Tweetle were still on Casey's side, then something bad would've happened to him. But, since he's not on her side anymore, something bad happened to Casey instead. She got locked in the dungeon!" Henry responded.

"How do you know?" Elana asked.

"I just do. Just like you know how to talk," Henry said briskly. "We fairies have some powers too, you know. Now let's watch Casey get questioned before she goes to the most unbreakable prison in the world . . . the Titanic Trapper!" Henry said grandly. "It's the

boat that we stole from the Lumans on Perth. No, no, no. *Humans on Earth!*"

"Oh, please don't get anything from other planets mixed up again. I've heard a LOT already," Elana muttered under her breath.



"What did you use to take over Neptunian citizens?" Captain Hawkins questioned.

"Magic, but . . ." Casey grumbled.

"Did you know it is illegal to use magic for evil?" Captain Hawkins asked.

"Yeah, but . . ." Casey admitted.

"About how many crimes have you committed?" Captain Hawkins inquired.

Casey looked thoughtful as she put her fingers up, one at a time, while muttering to herself. "Fifty-six times, but . . ."

"Okay! Got it!" Captain Hawkins replied cheerfully. "Mr. Remy, Mr. Sagard!" he called to his guards. "Take her to the Titanic Trapper!" The guards appeared with handcuffs, clamping them on Casey's hands.

Seeing that she was doomed, Casey made one last effort. "Those two boys!" she panted. "They did it all. I just gave them some advice!" Captain Hawkins turned around to see that Casey was talking about Tweetle and Twootle.

"Did she?" he asked.

"No, she *told* us what to do," Twootle answered.

"And we only obeyed because she told us that it was the right thing to do. And she kept Twootle under her mind

control," Tweetle added.

"But why did you believe her?" Captain Hawkins inquired. Casey gave an evil smile. Tweetle looked terrified.

Elana knew this was her time to speak up.

"I wouldn't question Tweetle's motives," Elana said, defending her friend. "If Tweetle hadn't touched the N on the lightning bolt, many people would still be under Casey's orders,"

Tweetle gave her a grateful smile.

"True," Captain Hawkins said, smiling again. "Now, Casey, I will see you into the Titanic Trapper!!" Casey gave a horrible glare in Elana's direction as Mr. Remy and Mr. Sagard guided her.

Elana smiled to herself. With some help from her friends, she had finally defeated Casey!

XIX: Goodbyes

"Goodbye, Elana!"

"Goodbye, Elana!"

"Hope to see you soon!"

"I'll miss you!"

"Bye!"

Elana was in Casey's humongous bathroom. Henry claimed that the spell to bring her home only worked in the bathroom. Everyone, including people she didn't know and Hau'oli, reunited with *her* parents, was bidding her goodbye. Henry flew up to her and whispered, "Don't tell your parents about your adventure." Then she gave her a kiss on her cheek, and Elana was home in her bed.

"Oh, Elana, sweetie!" Elana's mom

cried, rushing to her side. “We loved the story that you wrote, the one about how you met that fairy named Henry. I’m so proud of you! Ms. Richard gave you an A+ on writing, and she said that she was going to publish it!”

Elana was confused at first, and then she remembered Henry’s powers. She realized that Henry had captured all of her adventures in a book and made everyone think that Elana had written it instead of lived it!

“Um,” Elana paused, then said enthusiastically, “Thanks so much, Mom!”

Elana’s mom smiled at her before announcing, “Bedtime!”

As Elana brushed her teeth, she realized that the adventure *had* been amazing. She hoped she would see her magical new friends again!

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

Anya Bravin, 8
Aiden Chen, 11
Claire Jiang, 13
Emily Ma, 10
Kate McQuade, 9
Jacob Meyerson, 10
Roon Thapanangkun, 9

Nonfiction

Charlotte McAninch, 12
Brooke Sherman, 11

Poetry

Dhyana Abeysinghe, 13
Esme Black, 9
Nathan Chun, 9
Zaid Nazif, 11

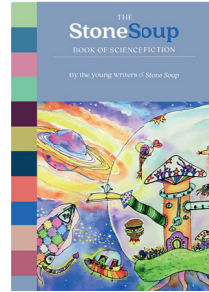
Art

Aiden Adams, 11
Anna Talbot, 9

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