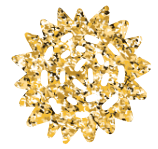


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# Table of Contents



## How I Got My Legs . . . p.1

Did you know that humans can secretly be mermaids?  
“A warm, whimsical pourquoi that you will want to read again and again!”

## Mr. Fox and Mr. Bear Build a Rocketship . . . p.2



Two friends enjoy the benefits of their teamwork.  
“An endearing story of friendship and adventure!”


## Bob’s Alien-tastic Birthday . . . p.3

A scavenger hunt is the perfect game for an out-of-this world surprise party.  
“A creative tale filled with laughter and the unexpected!”

## If an Alien Went to the Gym . . . p.7

Maybe gyms aren’t made for aliens.  
“A hilarious and insightful reflection on accepting your limitations and gifts.”

## Saving the Elm Tree . . . p.8



A weed, an elm tree, and a bear find out just how much they have in common.  
“A heartwarming story about how a shared interest can be enough to build a lifelong friendship.”


## A Holiday Experience . . . p.10

A brave chicken experiences a narrow escape.  
“A unique perspective lends this story a subtle gentleness and depth.”

## Foxcat: Secret Secretary Service . . . p.11

Can Foxcat and friends band together to defeat a monster-creating villain?  
“An imaginative adventure filled with twists and turns!”

## Mysterious World of the Twenty-First Century . . . p.15




A time traveler from 1849 observes the curious world of 2021.  
“This inventive travel log will have you seeing the world with fresh eyes!”

## Are You Scared Yet? . . . p.17

Young lemmings hear a frightening tale of the mythical Snowfox.  
“A riveting modern-day ghost story!”

## Grandma!? . . . p.20



A girl makes an unexpected friend when she travels back in time to 1984.  
“A deeply touching story about the power of love and friendship.”

## The Plant . . . p.24

A lonely girl gains comfort and confidence when she befriends an insightful plant.  
“An inspiring reminder that helpers can be found everywhere when you know how to listen.”



# How I Got My Legs

By Layla B., Age 6



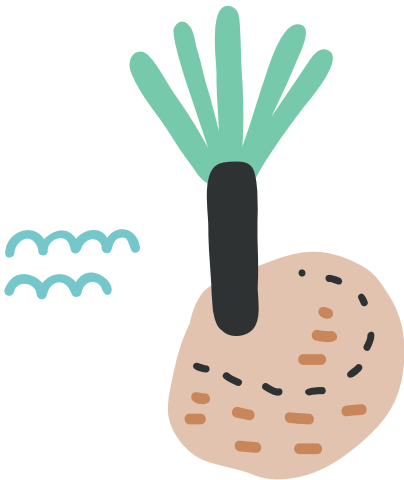
Did you know that humans can secretly be mermaids? I have been a mermaid my whole life. This is the story of how I got my legs.

First, I wished on a mermaid moon while I was swimming in the cold Rio. This helped me begin my journey to your world.

Then, I found magical seaweed on the island of Grenada. When I put it on my head, my tail turned into legs!

Finally, the waves washed me onto the sandy beach.

**The end.**



# Mr. Fox and Mr. Bear Build a Rocketship

Billy B., Age 6



One fine morning, Mr. Fox got a splendid idea when he got out of bed, to build a rocketship! He asked his friend Bear if he could help.

“OK,” said Bear, “I’d be delighted to!”

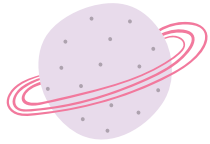
“Great!” Mr. Fox said to himself. Then he told Bear “Let’s gather our supplies!”

They gathered glue, orange paint, a hammer, some wood, a saw, some screws, a screwdriver, and some nails. But then, when it was built, it started to snow. Of course, like most people, they got distracted by the snow, playing games.

Then, 15 minutes later, after their clothes were wet, Mr. Fox remembered about the rocketship! He told Bear and they blasted off, and not only did they see the planets, they discovered a new one! Planet Ice, where the snow fun never ends!

**The end.**





# Bob's Alien-tastic Birthday

Elisha F., Age 7



Once upon a time, in a galaxy far, far away from our solar system, in a cold, pink planet called "Galagoop" there lived an Alien named Bob. He was three feet tall, his color was green, his eyes were as blue as the Earth's ocean, he had long antennae, a dome-shaped body, and squiggly feet. He lived in a metallic square home with metallic antennae.

His birthday was 1 week away and he would be turning 12, in Galagoop years. Bob wanted to celebrate his birthday with his friends.

His friends, Annie (a pink alien with purple eyes, who was shaped just like him), Charlie (a yellow alien with green eyes, who was also shaped just like him), Ashley (a purple alien with orange eyes, who was also shaped just like him), Tim (who was red with yellow eyes and shaped just like him), and Sam (an orange alien with black eyes, who was also shaped just like him), we're planning a surprise party for Bob.

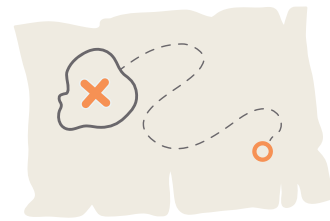
When the day of his party came, Bob looked for his friends to invite them to his birthday party. But he had a big problem. He forgot to prepare for his birthday party! Bob looked for his parents, but they were nowhere to be found! So he looked and looked for his friends, but he couldn't find them either! Bob scratched his head, not knowing what to do.

Suddenly, he found a map laid down on the floor of his house. He wondered, "What is this map doing here?" The map had green dotted lines which led to spots marked with "X's". The map instructed him to look for clues (in the form of riddles) in each spot. He followed the directions to the first place marked with an "X".

When he arrived at the place, he found a bottle covered with a cork, with a piece of paper inside. He popped off the cork and read the riddle. The riddle said "Find the couch that has a mitten, and there you'll find something hidden."

It took Bob 1 Galagoop minute and 30 Galagoop seconds to find the right couch. First, he looked under the cushions. Then, he looked behind the couch. Next, he looked under the couch where he found 2 yellow eyes blinking right at him. It was Tim! Tim crawled out from under the couch. Bob was glad to have found Tim.

Bob asked him, "Where are Annie, Charlie, Ashley, and Sam?"

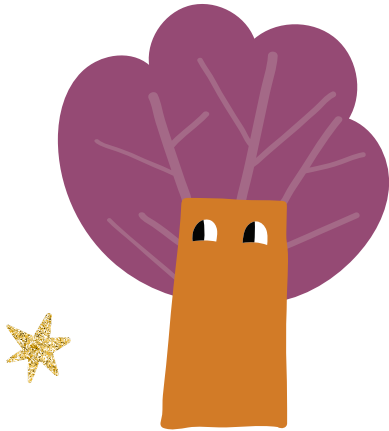


Tim answered, "I know where they are hiding, but I don't know what they're designed as."

Bob asked, "You mean they are in disguises?"

Tim replied "Yep!" Bob looked at the map to see where they were going next.

The next place that had an "X" on the map was a very big "goo" tree. It was called the "goo" tree because it had goo for leaves. This is where the aliens in Galagoop come for meetings. The goo tree's goo was colored purple.



But something was strange about the tree. There were 2 eyes blinking at him. Bob noticed a piece of paper stuck to the trunk of the goo tree with goo glue. It was the next riddle, "On top of this goo, wait for a peek-a-boo!" When Bob looked up again, Ashley quickly jumped out of the goo tree and cried "PEEK-A-BOO!"

Startled, Bob jumped off his squiggly feet and shouted excitedly, "ASHLEY! What a surprise!"

After finding Ashley, the three friends went to the next destination, which according to the map, was Tim's house. Together they entered Tim's house. It was a big mess. The house was stuffed with a lot of food. There

were sloppy, moldy, goo burgers and flying saucer goo mushroom pizzas everywhere! Bob bravely scoured through all the mess to search for the next riddle that would lead him to find another friend.

Then Bob found it! The riddle was stuck to a goo fly-trap which was stuck to a moldy goo burger. Bob snatched the paper off of the goo fly-trap and read the riddle. It said "The friend you seek, looks like food that reeks."

Bob thought to himself, "How do you find food that reeks? Everything reeks here at Tim's house!" Then Bob had a lightbulb moment. "Of course! Food comes from the fridge!" exclaimed Bob. He quickly darted towards the kitchen, as far as he could remember where it was, leaving Tim and Ashley behind somewhere in the jungle of a mess.

He finally found the kitchen. It was way dirtier and smellier than Tim's living room. Bob then opened the fridge only to find more disgusting food. There were moldy goo pickles, slimy sub sandwiches, sloppy space cheese, and worse, sloppy cheese fondue!

"P.U! How many disgusting things does Tim keep in here?!" said Ashley.

Tim said "Oh, I haven't counted... maybe about 25 million disgusting things including moody carrots and grapes in the basement? Smells wonderful doesn't it? There are even more disgusting or should I say LOVELIER things in the attic. Wanna see?"

"No thanks!" replied Ashley.

Meanwhile, in the kitchen, Bob found a moldy cheese with only two green dots. Bob thought to himself, “Moldy cheese normally has more than two green dots.”

Suddenly, the two green dots moved and the cheese started to talk, “Hello...BOB!”

Frightened, Bob screamed, “AAAAAHHH!!!”

Ashley and Tim ran towards the kitchen as soon as they heard Bob scream, Ashley leaping over the mess while Tim was eating his way through. Gasping for breath, Bob said to Tim and Ashley. “THE CHEESE IS ALIVE!!! IT KNOWS MY NAME!!!”

Then Ashley asked Bob, “Did you just get hit in the head?”

Bob replied, screaming, “LISTEN TO THE CHEESE!!!”

The cheese said “Hello Ashley and Tim!”

Startled, Tim and Ashley screamed “AAAAHHHH!!! IT KNOWS OUR NAMES!!!”

Then Bob said, “EXACTLY!!!”

In the middle of all the commotion, Charlie popped out of his cheese shape and said, “Relax guys, it's me, Charlie!”

Bob, Ashley and Tim then calmed down and said, “Charlie!!! you scared us!” When they all settled down, Bob looked at the map for the next destination.

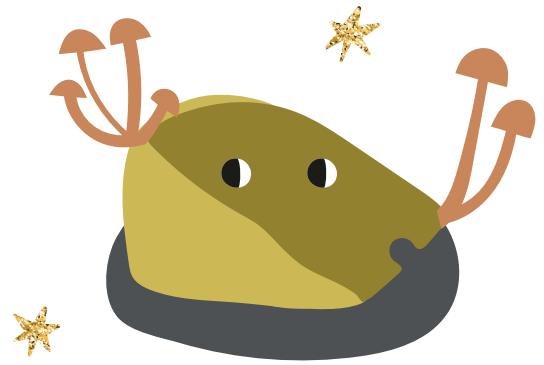
Charlie joined Bob, Ashley and Tim to the next spot on the map which led them to Bob's School “Alien University”. The map led them to the cafeteria. When they went inside, Tim quickly got distracted by all the food he found there. He ate like he hadn't eaten in years. While Ashley was trying to get him to stop eating, Bob and Charlie picked up a piece of paper stuck on a cafeteria table! It was the next riddle.

The riddle said, “A friend is missing, look for a pumpkin.” Bob looked around and saw something that looked like a pumpkin from Goopaleen (like Halloween in Galagoop). The Pumpkin had a black hat and a mustache. Bob thought that the mustache looked like goop frosting. Then the pumpkin started to talk. “Hello!”

Bob remarked, “Great! More talking food!” The pumpkin jumped out of the plate and landed in front of Bob.

After examining the pumpkin carefully, Bob realized that it was Sam. Then Charlie exclaimed “ Sam has grown a mustache!” Bob scooped out some of the “mustache” from Sam and licked it. It was goop frosting!

Meanwhile, Tim was busy gobbling up all the food he could find in the cafeteria, with Ashley still trying to stop him. With no other option in mind, Ashley dragged him out of



the cafeteria and out of the door. Tim yelled, “FOOOOOOOOOD!!! NOOOOOO!!!” Charlie, Sam, and Bob followed them out of the cafeteria. It was time to go to the next stop.

The friends reached the last stop on the map. It is the place where alien spaceships take off to explore the new planets. The aliens called it “The Launchpad.” This time there was no riddle, Bob wondered why they were there.

Then, they heard some music. It was Bob's favorite song “Goop Off,” from the “Cool Goop Band.” Afterwards, there were fireworks! And dancing lights! Finally, Annie came out with a big goop cake with goop cream and goop frosting, Bob's favorite cake. It had Bob's face on it and read “Happy Birthday Bob!”. His parents and other friends from school all came out to greet him and sing The Birthday Song. Bob was pleasantly surprised.

His friends said, “You haven't seen the best yet!”

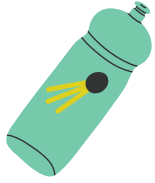
“What do you mean?” Bob asked.

His friends rolled out a very huge present. Together, Bob and his friends opened the present and he was excited and thrilled to have his very own spaceship at 12. He exclaimed “This is the best birthday ever!”

**The end.**







# If an Alien Went to the Gym

Jaxon M., Age 7

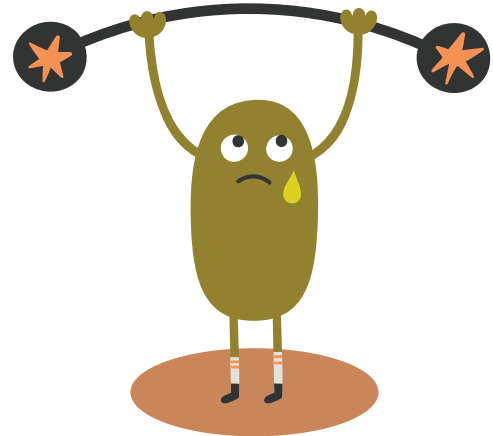
If an alien went to the gym, he would try to use the treadmill but his feet would get suctioned to the treadmill causing him to fall around and around and around!

If an alien went to the gym, he would try to use the bench press but his noodle arms would drop it on his chest, pinning him to the bench.

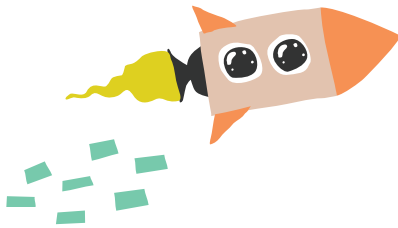
If an alien went to the gym, he would lift dumbbells but his thin and slimy fingers would drop it on his toes. Ouch! Ouch! Ouch!

If an alien went to the gym, he would try to ride the bicycle but his scrawny legs couldn't pedal. "There must be something I can do," he would think, so he would try the tanning bed but he would get the worst sunburn instead. He would think and think about what he could do next. He would try the swimming pool but find out he only sinks to the bottom.

Finally, he would decide maybe the gym wasn't for him. Maybe gyms aren't made for aliens. He would say goodbye to the trail of slime he left on the equipment and fly his spaceship back to his home, without any gyms.



**The end.**





# Saving the Elm Tree

by Minh L., Age 8



One day long ago, a weed was getting tired of attacking plants. He finally understood why humans say that they are “pretty” and “smell good”. So, he decided to have an adventure instead. First, the weed wanted to go far far away, the problem was that he couldn’t get out of the ground. Even though weeds are very strong, only humans could pull weeds out, as far as the weed knew. And the only way to get out of this problem was to get a little skinnier. So the weed didn’t drink any water for 3 days. The weed got skinnier, which was good, because now he could get out of the ground. But he felt very dehydrated and weak. So Willy Weed pushed with all his might and popped out of the ground, through the grass, and fell into a creek running through the forest. That perked him up, and after drinking a little of the water in the creek, he climbed out and shook off the water drops. After catching his breath and drinking some dew off a blade of grass because of all that exercise, he started to walk, and walk and walk, until he met a tall and thick tree. The tree was a kind, respectful tree, not one of those grouches that are mad because they are stuck standing in one place. Although this tree looked very ugly because of its thick bare branches and gnarly trunk, it made the weed feel welcome. Edmund the Great Elm Tree looked down at Willy Weed with his large, round bark eyes that seemed to be distant holes and said, “How are you doing? You look like you are lost. I have never seen a weed all by itself.”

“I feel better now that I have had a drink.” said the weed, “I’m having an adventure.” Edmund yawned and pondered this. “Maybe you can climb me to start your adventure.” “That sounds fun!” And Willy started to climb the tree and began to think, “Maybe this might not be the right choice.” It wasn’t. A very tall person with bulging arms appeared carrying a looooooong axe as Willy was catching his breath. “What is that person doing?” The weed nervously asked the tree.

Edmund whispered fearfully, “That person is called a lumberjack. He is here to cut my dead branches off, but they’re not dead. I just never grew any leaves! I’ve been waiting 70 years and a single leaf hasn’t grown.” The tree sobbed.



Willy thought for a minute. Then he said, “Maybe I could be the leaves.” Through his crying the tree stuttered, “Thanks but you are just a weed.” Willy replied encouragingly, “Weeds multiply really fast and if I climb up and stick to your lowest branch, you’ll have leaves all over before you know it.” Edmund thought this was a great idea, but he was still worried about the lumberjack.

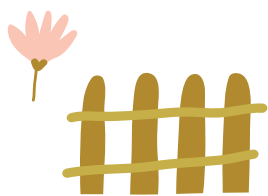
Meanwhile, the lumberjack saw the weed and decided to kill him. As he was heading toward Edmund and Willy, he suddenly heard the growl of a grizzly bear in the distance. He grabbed his axe and scampered away. This big lumberjack wasn’t very brave. Willy and Edmund breathed in unison, “Whew!”

As soon as the guy with the axe was out of sight, Willy climbed to the lowest branch and stuck himself on to it and then miraculously it started to rain. Why was the rain a miracle? Because now Willy could multiply and spread and make bright shiny elm leaves for Edmund. Edmund was very happy because he didn’t look ugly anymore and he wouldn’t get chopped down. Now he was a majestic Elm Tree! After a little while the grizzly bear wandered over to Edmund and greeted him, “Hi, my name is Paddie. It is very sunny after the rain and you look more shady than most of the trees in the woods. May I take a nap under your branches? You have so many beautiful new leaves!”

Edmund was proud that he was beautiful and he thanked Willy, and said, “Paddie, you are always welcome to come here.” And so Paddie took a nap and Willy took a nap too. The best part was that Edmund was never chopped down. Edmund and Paddie and Willy stayed friends forever.

**The end.**





# A Holiday Experience

Khadija N., Age 9



I made it out of that chicken coop alive! Although I feel really sorry for my family and my friends, I have to do this for myself. As a chicken it is difficult to take your life into your own hands. No, not during the festive season in Nigeria.

It was by a stroke of luck that gained my freedom. You know, taking advantage of one of those chance happenings. These things don't come around too often in a chicken's life. I knew trouble was lurking round the corner when I overheard Farmer Ben muttering to himself about record sales this festive season.

“Festive season, what festive season?” I wondered. Then it dawned on me! The Christmas holidays! That's a chicken's worst season of the year. There was no doubt in my mind, chickens in the poultry had a date with destiny... the cooking pot to be precise, the main course on the festive table. Armed with this information, I was determined not to go down without a fight.

I escaped being part of the festivities last year by a whisker, and I wasn't going to be on the Christmas menu this time either. Not if I could help it. First, I thought to lose weight, surely that was wise. But I couldn't lose so much so fast. So, I kept vigil, waiting for the opportunity to escape. I do believe angels in chicken Heaven were on my side because a week to Christmas, Farmer Ben opened the coop to feed us. I slipped past him in the flurry of other birds' wings and feathers scrambling to get the seeds. I hurried out to the field. I held my breath, but it appeared he hadn't noticed and neither did Mutt, Farmer Ben's dog. Free at last!

I had arrived and survived yet again! As I flew onto a passing truck, I thought this was one holiday I would not forget in a hurry. I turned around to inspect the truck and my eyes widened in disbelief. It was a truck filled with cages of frightened chicken eyes staring back at me, knowing their fate was sealed this holiday season.



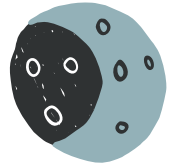
**The end.**



# Foxcat: Secret Secretary Service



by Ethan S., Age 10



Foxcat padded through the mighty winds towards her fox den, anticipating the special meeting she was about to attend. Through the half-moon's light, she could barely make out the glow of the iron trapdoor ahead. The wind nearly pushed her to the ground as she thought of what new things she could share with her friends about Everon. Everon was an evil villain intent on making Foxcat and her friends suffer from the horrible monsters she made. So far, Foxcat had seen these villains in the past: Monster Mower, Milkhead, Oranjoe, Cataron, and Everon herself. As she neared, she thought she heard a tree fall close by, but the wind was blowing so hard, she couldn't tell. She was used to trees falling down; they often came crashing down near the lumberjack's cabin. One time, her friend Dalcat, who was a Dalmatian dog, but acted like a scaredy-cat most of the time, mustered up his courage and tried to tell the lumberjack to stop cutting down trees, and he got so mad, he got out his chainsaw, and ran after Dalcat with it, trying to scare him away, but not hurt him. But, Dalcat had thought the lumberjack was out to get him, and to this day, will not come close to his cabin. This memory made Foxcat want to see her friends even more, so she picked up the pace, and ran to the locked trapdoor with ease. Her leg had now fully recovered from the fall she'd taken on the tall building Everon called home, which had enabled her to gallop in long strides towards her home. She put in the password for the meeting: W HELP ME. Which stood for "Worm, Hunty, Emma, Lila, Possum, Mary, Evan." They were her best friends, and also the ranking leaders in her investigation program in her search to find the wanted Everon.



"Today, Lightfowl is sick; I guess we'll have to make do without the president," Foxcat said as she burst into the room, panting quietly. The air was cool, despite the 78 Fahrenheit degree weather and the fireplace inside. Everyone looked at her like she was crazy for a second, then started laughing.

"You came in here like it was an emergency!!" Hunty laughed.

"Hunty, you're the vice president; you'll start off the board meeting." Foxcat said, the mood suddenly darker for some reason.



“Boy, am I excited,” Hunty said, with sarcasm. Hunty always got on Foxcat’s nerves, one way or another. She had a way of firing everyone up, but not in a good way. “Lightfowl has not been here for the past seven board meetings. I’d like to see if she wants me to become president full-time!”

Foxcat said, trying to keep the peace, “Hunty; let’s cool down. We all know what happens if Lila gets started up-”

“You’re not the only one questioning her absence; last time I saw her, it was in December. And it is July now!” Lila said from her chair, near the fireplace where a fire was crackling quietly.

“Now, wait a minute,” Foxcat said, failing to calm everyone down, “Let’s just get started, and not worry about attendance-”

“But today is Attendance Day, and even Dalcat has managed to come to this,” Possum said from the ceiling, trying to catch and eat stray bugs who might happen to fly in with the windy storm outside.

“He has?” Suddenly, she realized that he had been there the whole time. How silly of her, he had been sitting right there, all that time, next to the moving plant.

Wait, plants don’t move around like that! Maybe her eyes were tricking her, after all, it was past her bedtime. She had barely snuck out of her parent’s house, with all the security cameras set up to keep her indoors. How had Dalcat got in? He was a kid, just like her, and his parents know about his identity as one of the greatest superheroes ever, even worse. “It feels like everyone knows Dalcat’s identity now, after he beat the ink-spitting, city-locating enemy spider, Penpoint,” Foxcat thought with curiosity, which brought her back to her question.

“How did you sneak in here like that? You don’t know the password!” Foxcat exclaimed.

“True, but I do know this: Everon has zapped the sun of its energy, and with the sun’s rays, she is bringing back old bosses, and charging them into new, more powerful bosses!!” Dalcat exclaimed, out of breath.

“Can I have a glass of lemonade?” Dalcat said.

“Sure!” Foxcat was really wanting to hear how Dalcat had got in with no password. She was so focused, she barely heard the plant sneak up on Dalcat and pinch him. “I must really be hallucinating now; I just saw a plant reach out a human finger and pinch Dalcat.” Foxcat shouted, “DALCAT? Did a plant just pinch you?” But Dalcat was too absorbed in drinking the cool, fresh, sweet lemonade Foxcat got him to notice her shouting at the top of her lungs.

“SLURP! Now, as I was saying:



These bosses are hard to beat! I tried yesterday, and it took me all day! Also, is it just me, or... Is Everon's right hand blue?"

Foxcat then saw the plant scurry up into a famous painting, she could not remember which one, and hide there. "I don't know which one I should be more worried about: my hallucinations, or how Dalcat snuck in. I guess how Dalcat snuck in; hallucinations won't hurt others." Foxcat resolved. "No, it is not just you. It looks like vines are twisted around her hand, making it that color. And, I want to know: how did you get in here?" Foxcat was itching for the answer to both questions.

"Let's not worry about that," said the vice president, Hunty. "Let's worry about the Mona Lisa sneaking away!"

"That's not the Mona Lisa painting! We've NEVER had the Mona Lisa in here," said Worm, who popped out of the ground randomly. "I know, because I'm the guard of this board meeting, and one of my many jobs is to check for fraud things!"

"Stop talking, and grab it already, before it gets away," Dalcat shouted, over the windy noises outside. So, they all grabbed the precious painting, and, when pulled, revealed: "EVERON!!" they all yelled at the same time.

"Oh, shoot. Should've picked my hallucinations," Foxcat thought to herself. Dalcat said bravely, "You spy! You can't give us one minute of privacy! Run back to your little tower if you thought you could sneak up and successfully spy on the mighty Dalcat! How did you get in here, anyway?"

"Same as you. Crashed through the roof," Everon grinned maliciously.

"All of my questions answered in one day," Foxcat thought. "This will go in the record book." Everyone looked at Dalcat with anger, while Everon snuck away, heading towards a small hole in the roof, where she had broken in. "You crashed through the roof?? Well, that answers our question, and you WILL be paying insurance to make up for it!" Foxcat said, realizing the full extent of what Dalcat had done at one time.

"I did NOT do that! Everon t-" Dalcat was interrupted by the sound of Everon laughing as she flew away.

"Wait a minute. Foxcat? Where is Everon?" Hunty said. "Uh-oh," they all said in unison.

"Hold on, did some supervillain girl just trick the best superhero in the world?" Hunty questioned.

"How come my thoughts have been so accurate today?" Foxcat questioned herself.

"Thanks for the compliment, and yes, she did." Dalcat explained.

"How?"



“She just did.” Dalcat was getting annoyed.

“Why?”

“She wanted to know what we are up to.” Dalcat was mad.

“So?”

“She KNOWS what we are up to!!” Dalcat was angry.

“How?”

“I am calling the governor. We need to take this onto a higher level.” And so, Foxcat rushed to the government building with her friends, avoiding traffic, road hazards, and construction workers along the way. They could see the roof of the government building now, steadily rising as they neared. Once they got close, Foxcat pushed a button on her car, and the car flipped, turning into a “make you invisible” jacket for everyone.

“You NEVER told me that your car could flip!” Dalcat exclaimed, shocked by the transformation. Even he couldn’t do something that cool with a vehicle. Wait a minute, no wonder he couldn’t: he didn’t have a car! Or, really anything powered by gas, except for the broken remains of the Monster Mower. And, even then, it won’t work.

“You NEVER told ME how you snuck into the board meeting without anyone knowing,” Foxcat said, hoping that Dalcat would finally tell her.

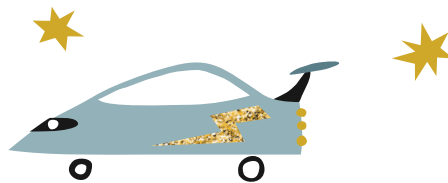
“Possum knew.”

“Forget about Possum, how did you get in?”

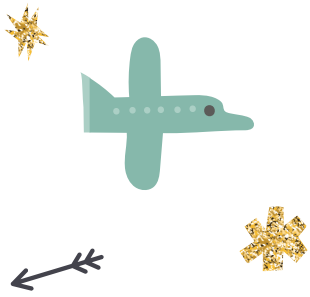
“Well, the truth is-” Suddenly, Foxcat hacked the computer’s lock on the door, and they walked in. Then, they quickly rushed to the Elevator, and hit button 3, the room that the Governor was currently working in at the time. Once the slow elevator finally reached the top, Foxcat discovered, to her surprise, that Dalcat’s idea actually worked, and the Governor was there, in her office. Will Foxcat and her friends succeed? Or will the Governor reject them? What’s next for the young heroes? And will they ultimately defeat against Everon?

Find out, in time it will be known.

**The end.**

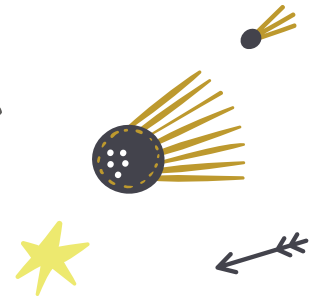






# Mysterious World of the Twenty-First Century

by Kate N., Age 11



## Day 1: Monday, January 20th, 1849

Monday, 1849, it was a frigid night while I was resting in my house and suddenly, I heard people shrieking. In terror, I peeked outside the window and witnessed a group of merciless warriors attacking the town. Treacherous arrows flew everywhere as people scrambled for their lives. Frantically, I fled my house through the fetid garbage-filled streets as quickly as possible to find a safe place. Suddenly, in the middle of an alley, there was a giant time machine that clattered and rumbled loudly, so I raced inside to hide. A loud noise, “Boom”, scared me as the machine took off. Soon, it landed in an alleyway. As the machine landed, a voice welcomed me to the future, 2021. Then, it enunciated that I had five days to explore the place. Next, it handed me a bracelet with instructions telling me when the bracelet flashed red, return to the machine to travel back home. Eventually, the door slowly opened, so I wandered outside.

## Day 2: Tuesday, January 21st, 1849

Walking to the street, I noticed I was not in the same era anymore. The streets were filled with people wearing weird, multicolored clothes and face coverings. Several were holding a rectangular metal block near their ears and conversing with it. At the corner of every street, there was also a tall metal stick that flashed green, yellow, and red in a pattern. Out of nowhere, I heard loud noises above me, which caused me to jump. Spotting a massive metal bird overhead, I dashed for cover but tumbled across a round, oval, shiny metal camel with wheels that zoomed across the street. Some could even flash red lights, make loud noises, and release unpleasant smoke scents. When I stood underneath the metal stick with flashing lights, several people rushed toward me and screamed at me to move. As the sun set, I tried to find a place to rest for the night. All of a sudden, I felt lonely and frightened. After all, I wondered what a weird place this was and why people covered their faces.

## Day 3: Wednesday, January 22nd, 1849

Hoping to find a spot to rest in this mysterious place, I plodded on, but I couldn't find a proper shelter, so I spent the night at the park. As I woke up, my body was filled with



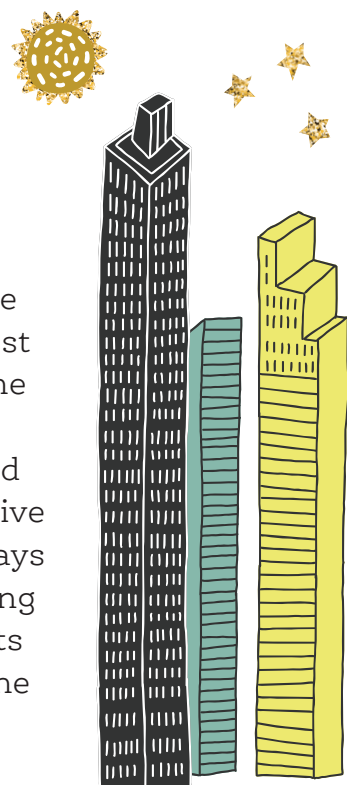
pain. I also caught sight of people playing kickball there. After a while, I decided to search for some food to feast on and a decent shelter to stay. Luckily, I found some bird eggs and some berries. As I started a fire to cook, a man wearing blue clothes and a hat stopped me and informed me that I wasn't allowed to cook in the park. Then he asked me to follow him. Because I didn't know what to do, I obeyed his command. He quickly took me to a building that he called his office. When we arrived, he arranged some food on a plate and placed it in a metal box for several minutes. After he took it out, the food was cooked! It was like magic! Cooking without fire was unbelievable!

#### **Day 4: Thursday, January 25th, 1849**

As the day proceeded, the man offered me a mask, so I asked him why people were wearing masks. I then learned it was to protect people from becoming sick from something called the "Coronavirus." I also asked him about all the weird metal objects. Then he stared at me like I was crazy and laughed hysterically. Nevertheless, I found out that the rectangular metal object that people held against their ears was called a "phone," which allowed people to gossip with each other. Another thing was the metal birds and the metal camels were known as "airplanes" and "cars" that people used to travel. The thing that impressed me the most was the metal box that was called the "microwave," which can cook food without fire. The more I learned about this strange world, the more confused I became.

#### **Day 5: Friday, January 26th, 1849**

As the sun set, the man took me to a shelter to sleep. Soon we were in front of multiple houses on top of each other. As I approached the front door, it opened and closed by itself, which startled me. It almost made me fly away, but the man advised me it was ok. Abruptly, in the middle of the night, my bracelet lit up. According to it, I only had a few minutes to arrive at the machine to return home. I quickly bolted to the alleyway and rushed into the machine. I learned many impressive things in this strange world. For example, I learned about different ways of life where people wear masks to protect themselves from becoming sick, how kind the man was, and all the amazing things metal objects could do. When I arrived home, I told my friends and family about the mysterious world of the twenty-first century that I had visited, yet they had a hard time believing me.



**The end.**





# Are You Scared Yet?



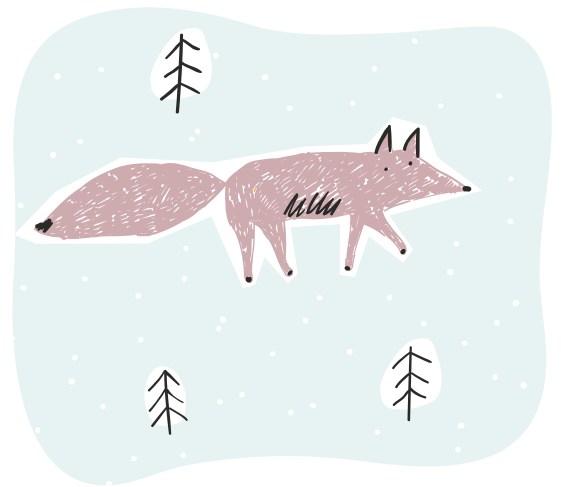
by Swara V., Age 12

The little lemmings huddled together in their burrow as their mother watched them carefully.

“Tell us a story!” one demanded.

“A scary one, not one about little hares finding green shoots. I hate those.” another exclaimed. The mother lemming shook her black and gold head and began.

The Snowfox has claws as sharp as icicles, and fur the color of snow. Pearly white fangs that can bite deep into you until frost envelops your soul. The Snowfox lives by the river, where the water freezes late in winter and thaws early in spring. It is a green place where you can almost always find food, but no one dares venture close, because of the lair of the Snowfox. You can't see the Snowfox when he stalks through the snow until he leaps onto you and carries you off. Then he holds you under the cold, cold water until your blood turns blue. And the last thing you'll ever see is cold black eyes staring back at you from the river.



The mom finished the story with a shudder, as the baby lemmings gave each other fearful looks. Except for one.

“I don't believe in monsters. There's no such thing as the Snowfox!” she scoffed. The mother snorted.

“Let me tell you some more...”

The Snowfox is so quiet that you'll never hear him coming, never see him until it is too late. The Snowfox glares at you with hunger glittering in his eyes. Once a little lemming was foraging by the river, and the Snowfox got her before she even had a chance to blink. The Snowfox can chase you until your legs fall off. He can always hear you even when you're buried deep in the snow or huddled in your burrow.

The mother whispered softly, as if she thought the Snowfox could hear them. The other lemmings shivered and snuggled into her fur, casting fearful glances at the roof as if the Snowfox was about to come crashing into the burrow. The outspoken one stood aside, looking skeptical.



“I don't believe you! There's no such thing as a Snowfox. Nothing can hear that well, or run that fast.” she said obstinately.

“You haven't heard everything yet! I'm sure when I'm done, you'll believe in the Snowfox!” the mother insisted, pulling her stubborn offspring closer.

“The Snowfox will come and get you. He lives where the ground is frozen hard and you can't dig your way out. The Snowfox lurks in the tundra snows, and when you least expect it, he will pounce. Worst of all, no matter what you say, or how much you plead, the Snowfox can't hear you scream.”

The mom finished the story dramatically, with an ominous pause at the end. The little lemmings started chattering softly.

“What a scary story!”

“The Snowfox sounds big and scary!”

“I don't wanna be eaten!”

“Uh, guys. That wasn't even a story!” one of them exclaimed. “I'm tired of hearing descriptions of this so-called “Snowfox.” Monsters don't exist, and I'll prove it!” she promised, before racing down a tunnel towards the exit. The vast network of burrows had few entry points, but eventually the baby lemming found one.

She marched outside and was shocked by the cold air that seemed to bite into her fluffy black and gold fur. It was her first time outdoors, and the 2-week old lemming felt like the snow would consume her. Still, she hurried forward, running until the ground under her paws was solid and she couldn't dig. Her mother had said that the Snowfox lived there. She saw a hint of green up ahead. The river! Where that so-called Snowfox lived.

Suddenly she saw a huge paw print in the snow, just by the river. A chill shot down her tiny spine but she straightened up and pushed through. She looked into the blood-chilling blue waters of the river. Reflected in the icy waters she saw cold black eyes: her own. Her gold and black fur looked frosty white under the snow, and she could easily pretend her tiny Paws had icicle-sharp claws. She snorted. Some naive lemming pup had snuck off to the river, seen their own reflection, and gotten so scared they fell in. She played around the river for a bit, chomping on the fresh, juicy leaves and lapping the cool river water. It was paradise in the tundra.

The soft paws behind her were just barely audible when all was quiet, and the lemming couldn't hear a thing over the sound of crunching leaves. Icicle-sharp claws scraped against the hard floor, where no creature could burrow away. With swift paws, the creature was fast enough to chase a lemming through the snow until their legs fell off. Sharp ears could hear the lemming snuffling among the tundra snows. A pelt as white as fresh snowfall. He bared his pearly white fangs, dripping with crimson, his breath



smelling of the rank odor of fresh terror. His eyes glittered as he looked hungrily at the lemming.

“Hello little one. You'll make a sufficient snack.” he hissed, pouncing on the lemming. Just in time, the little creature darted away, eyes widening with fear. She hid, wedged between two rocks, while the Snowfox watched and waited. The little lemming howled, but the Snowfox stood still, seemingly oblivious to the screams. The lemming shook with fear. Their mother was right. The Snowfox was real. It lurked overhead in the tundra snows, waiting and watching. It could hear every sound you made but was oblivious to your screams. The little lemming was cornered, and now those pearly white fangs would sink into her soul. Still, she's stiffened.

“I see that you're going to eat me,” she said imperiously, glaring at the Snowfox.

The predator looked amused, “Indeed I am,” he replied.

“Well then tell me this. Are you really going to hold me in the river until my blood turns blue? That's the one thing that hasn't been proven,” the lemming said obstinately.

“What—no! I don't like soggy meals,” the Snowfox said, stepping closer.

“Well tell my family that, alright? Tell them they were wrong.” the little lemming said. The Snowfox was practically drooling.

“I will, little morsel. Where is your food—err family?” The Snowfox inquired.

“Right over the hill and in the burrow warren. They should know that they were WRONG.” the lemming said coming out completely. The Snowfox nodded, icicle-sharp claws digging into the little lemming. She let out a final squeak, “They were wrong!” before the life was sucked out of her. The Snowfox finished his snack quickly, before hurrying up to the warren, where a bunch of terrified young lemmings would await him.

“And that,” the mother said, “is your story.”

“Did that really happen?” one of the Lemmings asked obstinately.

“Yep. I barely got away in time. Every single one of my pups was eaten because of that one stubborn lemming.” the mother said. The outspoken lemming looked doubtful but didn't argue.

“Wouldn't catch me going where I'm warned not to be!” she said decidedly. The mother snuffled happily, and the little lemmings huddled closer, content to listen to stories about little hares finding little green shoots.





# Grandma!?

by Jayda G., Age 14



“Jet!” Abigail yelled, as she tossed the ball to her young German Shepherd. It was a nice day, the sun was shining, and Abigail was spending her day at the park as usual. Abigail tossed the ball and Jet quickly scrambled after it... and right into the bushes.

“No! Jetson, here boy!” Abigail called after him, but he didn't return.

“Ugh!” she sighed in exasperation as she followed after him. Pushing the thick brush out of her face, Abigail continued to holler for her canine companion, with no response. All of a sudden, she felt the ground give way beneath her. A sinkhole.

She was falling and fast. At first, she only saw dirt around her and then it turned into this spiraling circle of color, and then she hit the ground. She knew she had been falling for about a minute. Logically, the impact should have hurt more than it did, but she felt as if she had fallen only two feet. Slowly, she rose to her feet and looked around. She seemed to be in the middle of a field of grass and sunflowers. For some odd reason, this place looked kind of like the park she was in, but without the equipment. Abigail slowly started walking in the direction that she thought the town should be. She eventually came across a sign that said “WELCOME TO TULSA” her hometown.

This place may have the same name, but it didn't look like her town. The houses were different, there were fewer stores, and there was a small sapling in place of the huge apple tree that used to reside in the town center. Where was she? The streets looked different and everything was so old-fashioned. There were teens and young adults all dressed in brightly colored clothing, like really bright. Abigail didn't know any of these people, which was odd because she knew most of the kids in her town. She walked into a restaurant labeled ‘New Fashioned Diner.’ When she walked in, all eyes were on her, but she didn't even notice because she was gawking at the calendar behind the counter that read July 16th, 1984.

As the realization set in, Abigail went into a panic. She was in 1984! How did this happen? How would she get home? She hadn't an answer to any of these questions, but she wanted to go home and she wanted to go now. She stumbled out of the diner in a daze, when she came across a line of teenagers waiting to get into the roller rink. She heard a voice call out “Cathy!” as she came face to face with the girl about her age, who looked oddly familiar.



“Oh, I’m sorry” Abigail said as they collided.

“No problem, really.” the girl said, regaining her balance. Although she was sure she knew this girl from somewhere, she couldn't quite put her finger on it.

“Hi! I'm Cathy.” said the girl.

“Oh, I’m Abigail.” she responded.

“Well, Abby it is then!” Cathy said grinning. They talked for a minute and then decided to go into the skating rink. They skated for a while, and for a moment, Abigail was having so much fun that she forgot that she was lost. But now the problem came back to her and she panicked again. She began thinking of ways to get home.

Abigail and Cathy finished skating and started walking together. They walked a ways down the street until they got to Cathy's house. “Hey, I have an idea,” Cathy said smiling. “You wanna stay the night?” Abigail thought for a moment. She didn't know where she was, she had nowhere to go, and she hadn't figured out how to get home.

“Sure I'd love to!” she finally responded.

“Yes! Okay, let's go up to my room!” Cathy replied enthusiastically. Abigail stayed with Cathy and had a lot of fun.

They woke up in the morning and Cathy's mom had made them breakfast. “I assume you go to the same school, so you can just ride with me,” Cathy offered. Abigail hesitated. She hadn't thought about school; she didn't know where to go.

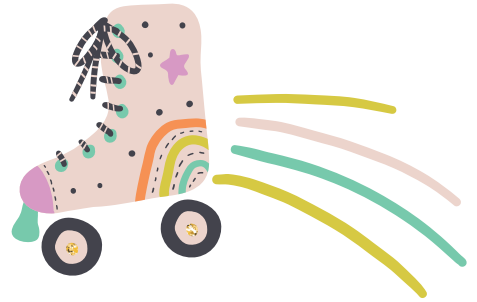
“Um...okay,” Abigail uttered. They got ready and headed out.

They went into the school, and somehow, Abigail was just allowed to go into the same class as Cathy. In one of the classes, there was a substitute teacher. When the teacher called attendance, instead of saying “Cathy” like the others, he said “Catherine Hawthorne.”

Catherine Hawthorne?! That was her grandma’s name! “What year is it again?” she thought, panicking once again. 1984, it was currently 1984. Her grandma would be 14 right now. *Oh my god, that's my grandma!* Abigail thought. She decided not to say anything to Cathy.

Abigail stayed with Cathy for the next few days, and everything went smoothly. Well, everything except the fact that she felt the secret swelling inside her like a balloon about to burst. One night, they stayed up late making friendship bracelets. Cathy made Abigail a blue one that said “Abby” on it and Abigail made Cathy a red one that said “Cat” on it.

“Why does it say Cat on it?” Cathy questioned.



"I don't know, just a shortened version of Cathy." Abigail replied. She had always called her grandma "Grandma Cat" and she didn't know why. Abigail gently put her bracelet in her pocket.

The next morning, Abigail decided to tell Cathy the secret. She told her about how she got there, about the diner she went into, and even about the attendance and how she knew she was her grandma.

"I know it seems a little crazy, but it's true." Abigail said, and surprisingly Cathy believed her.

"I can't believe I'm your grandma," Cathy said quietly, "It's just weird."

"I know it's weird Cathy, but it's true" Abigail said slowly.

"Well, if I have a granddaughter, then I'm glad it's you because you're pretty cool." Cathy said laughing.

"So," Cathy said smirking.

"So what?" Abigail asked.

"So where did you fall in?"

Abigail and Cathy headed back to where Abigail had woken up a few days ago.

"Right through these bushes." Abigail said. She started walking through them just as she had before. Cathy followed after her. All of a sudden Abigail screamed somewhere up ahead.

"Abby!?" Cathy yelled looking frantically around. She was gone.

Abigail was awoken by the sloppy kisses of her dog, Jet. She looked around and she appeared to be back in the park. All the equipment was back and she saw people she knew walking on the street. She walked up to a woman and her dog and said, "Excuse me miss, but can you tell me the year?"

The lady looked at Abigail, confused. "2023" she said slowly.

"Thank you," Abigail replied. She was back and no time had passed, her phone still said 3:03 p.m. Had she dreamed at all? She couldn't have, it felt so real. She slowly started walking home.

When she got home she went to her room to get changed. She went to put her dirty clothes in the laundry and felt something in one of her pockets. Slowly she pulled out a dark blue bracelet with a single word on it, "Abby."

A few months had passed now since she had that odd experience and she still thought about it often. Now, her mother walked in her room and sat on the bed beside her.



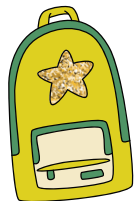
“Your grandma left this for you when she passed.” her mother said handing her a small box.

Abigail looked at her mother and back at the box. Her grandma had passed away a month earlier. After Abigail's weird experience, she decided not to talk to her grandma about it just in case she was crazy. Now, she was sitting here with this box with the little piece of paper on top that read "Open when I'm gone."

Abigail's mom slowly got up and left. Abigail lifted the lid and pulled out a note. It said, “Dear Abby, It's okay that you didn't say anything about it and it's okay that I didn't either. But I knew it was you. Love, Cat.” Abigail sat in shock as she slowly pulled out the dusty red bracelet that had the word “Cat” in the middle, and put it on her wrist with the one that said “Abby.”

**The end.**





# The Plant

by Eva G., Age 14



The school bells ring and my stomach drops. My palms become sweaty. My heart is pounding out of my chest. The classroom walls are closing in on me. Ms. Parker calls our names for attendance. “Alex?”

“Here!”

“Amy?”

“Present.”

“Anna?” Thoughts fill my brain. What should I say? Present? Here? Is everyone looking at me? Am I taking too long to reply?

I said, “Here.” Finally, I got it over with. But was anyone still looking at me? Did I say it too quietly? Does my hair look okay? I try not to make eye contact with anyone and put my head down.

I was diagnosed with anxiety when I was 8. My anxiety began when my parents started departing early in the morning, arriving home late for dinner, leaving me to raise myself. I don’t really have friends, which is hard for a girl in the seventh grade. The walk home was the same pattern daily. Leave the school, cross the stop sign, walk down the street, left, right, another left, down the playground, then two houses down was home. I grabbed my key from the side pocket of my backpack and opened the door. Shoes off, backpack next to the kitchen table, grab my phone, then upstairs into my room. I open my phone and check my grades. I read them to myself, “F, D, C, D, C, C, F. Wow.” School adds additional torture to my brain. Unlike everyone else, I don’t have parents who tell me I need to focus or check if I did my homework. No one to make sure I’m not falling out of line.

“They won’t be home till 10,” I tell myself. My parents work at this big, fancy real estate corporation. Their excuse is they work all day to give me the life they never had.

I decided to go outside for a change, since I usually stay in my room on my phone. Down the street, I saw a little plant on the sidewalk. It stood out from all the others, isolated. It was dark and dull while all the others were a passionate green. It unquestionably reminds me of someone. I checked for cars then walked down the street to dig it out of the dirt



where it sat in a lonely position. I went inside and grabbed the first mug I saw, which ironically had the words “World’s Best Mom” on it. The plant rested perfectly inside and I put it on the shelf next to my window.

“Do they even care?” I asked the plant. “Whatever, what am I doing, talking to a plant?” I tell myself. Then, after a long pause, I heard a sweet, considerate voice.

“They do,” the plant responded to my query. I swiftly turned my head. I’m just imagining things. I grabbed my phone because I remembered reading online that talking to plants is good. The website said it helps them grow.

Still in disbelief, I said, “So, plant. I guess I have to talk to you.” I continued while laughing, “My name is Anna, I’m 13. I like sour candies and my parents are never home. What am I doing, this is dumb.” I walked away, but the plant said,

“Hi Anna. I don’t even know my parents!” the plant said jokingly.

“OH MY GOD!” I screamed. “YOU’RE A PLANT AND YOU’RE TALKING!”

“Calm down. Calm down,” the plant replied in a soothing voice. “I am here because you need me,” the plant affirmed with a matter of fact voice. “You need a friend that can listen, help you understand your emotions, and give you the tools that you need to overcome your insecurities,” it said in a reassuring tone. Immediately, I was able to open up and express my inner thoughts and emotions. I went to bed feeling lighter. As sleep took me away, I couldn’t stop thinking whether this was all a dream.

The next morning I’m woken up by my mom’s whispering voice. She said, “Lunch is in the fridge honey, have a great day,” laying a kiss on my cheek. I started to force my eyes open, but when they finally did, my dad shut the door, walking out in a rush like usual. In disbelief, I turned and the first thing I saw was my new plant. It took me hours to get ready. Should I put on the blue shirt? Or the white one? Do jeans look good? I hate using my mom’s makeup. I need new clothes. This is why no one wants to be my friend.

“Don’t beat yourself up, you can talk to me,” the plant said.

“I don’t know, I just put so much pressure on myself to look good in hopes that someone will be my friend,” I confessed to the plant. “I don’t even have the guts to talk to the kids at my school, so why care?”

“Maybe it is up to you to take the first step. You can talk to people, they won’t bite,” the plant responded. The plant’s advice made sense. How am I supposed to make friends if I don’t talk to anyone?

“That’s social anxiety for you,” I replied.



“Don’t worry Anna, I’m here now,” the plant said in a comforting way. I said goodbye to the plant and I walked to school.

I didn’t know that this school day was going to be one of the worst of the year. I go inside with my head down as usual. Staying on the sides of the hallway so I don’t embarrass myself. I get pulled into a classroom by a teacher calling my name and needing to speak to me.

“Hi, Anna. We need discuss your grades,” Ms. Richards said.

“Alright,” I replied timidly. We sit down on the cold plastic school chairs.

She asks, “Where can I contact your parents?”

“Nowhere,” I replied quickly with a serious face.

“But honey, we need to speak with them while you're here about your academics.”

“They won’t answer,” I told her as I felt my voice break. Every parent teacher conference. Every principal meeting. They haven't even stepped foot on school grounds since I started here.

“Where are they?” she asked.

“Work.” I said with my head down as my eyes turned red. The teacher got a phone number from the office and called them in front of me. No answer. She called again. No answer. I couldn’t take it anymore, so I just walked out.

“Anna! Get back here young lady! You can't just leave!” My ears blocked out her voice and I ran home. I felt the tears rushing down my face like waterfalls. It was like the world was against me. I got home to no parents, no love, no role models, just me. I throw myself onto my bed as I let everything come out of me. My hearing starts to come back as I hear the faint sound of the plant calling my name.

“Anna? What's wrong?” the plant asked in a concerned voice. I sit up and just let the words pour out of me. I told the plant about my parents, my grades, my mind, my thoughts, and how I’m going through it all alone. The plant comforts me in a way that almost feel its embrace gripping me tightly around my shoulders. The kind words it uttered truly healed me. I fell asleep in my bed as I calmed down.

As time flew by, the plant started to become my friend. I hadn’t felt what it was like to have one in a while. It made me feel so loved. I grew confident. The positive word made me forget about everything that was wrong with me in my head, and I started to see myself in a different perspective. School became less miserable. I sat down in the back of the class with a smile on my face and new clothes that I bought with some birthday money.

“Oh my god I love your shirt!” a girl tells me. Is she talking to me? I look behind me and then turn my head back to her. I pointed at my chest, asking if she was talking to me and she nodded. For the first time in 5 years, someone wanted to talk to me.

“Thank you,” I replied.

“So are you new here?” she asked. I shook my head no. She didn't even recognize me? I had seen her everyday since 5th grade, but never got the chance to know her name since my head was always down. We talked and I found out her name was Maddie. I exchanged numbers with her, and I couldn't believe it. I made a friend.

“Lets chat later! I'll call you after I finish my homework!” she yelled from across the hall as I smiled at her. Walking home I finally realized this was because of the plant. It made me feel my worth and it helped me with my anxiety.

As I ran up the stairs I yelled, “Plant! Plant! You will not believe what happened! The new shirt I bought, I got a compliment on it! And I made a friend! Would you ever expect that from me?” No response. The plant had been talking with me for weeks, but it suddenly stopped. I checked to see if maybe I didn't put enough water in the mug, but that wasn't it. I wanted to cry, but I kept my tears back because I knew it was because its work was done. I kissed the mug and said my final goodnight.

The next morning, I got ready quickly so I could bring the plant to school. I walk down the hall in my new clothes and combat boots, letting my styled hair rock back and forth. People looked at me and it wasn't because I was lonely. This time they looked because I was confident in my own skin. I found a girl grabbing her books from her locker. She was wearing dark clothes, and dirty converse, holding a Dungeons and Dragons book. She uncomfortably clutched the book into her arms. I walked up to her and said, “I love your shoes, I live for the grungy vibes.” She replied with a thank you in a very quiet voice while looking down. “I know this might be weird, but here,” I told her as I handed her the plant. “Trust in it. Maybe it will help you like it helped me.”

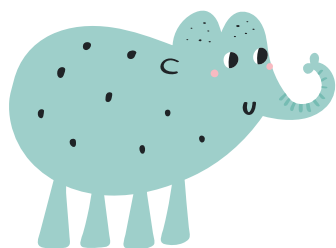


**The end.**





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