

Wyeknot

By Steve Cavin

Wyeknot
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Wyeknot

Dedication

*To Wai Ching, who helped me raise three children of
my own.*

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Chapter 1 - Getting Started

Zoë Strawberry Wilson and Horus Bluestone Heath lived between the mountains and the sea in a small village called Wyeknot, on the river Wye in South Wales. Zoë lived in a tiny redbrick house with a high peaked roof, surrounded by a grassy field that reached all the way from the stone wall at the front road clear down to the Big Woods and the creek. Horus lived next door, in a big stone farmhouse with a huge oak tree, at the end of a red dirt lane.

Theirs was a quiet place, with lots of creeks and woods, separated by fields and narrow dirt roads, none of which went very far. The two of them were good friends, and they had opportunities to play together 'most every day. Whether it was grand adventures or small tea parties it was always fun, and they treasured each other's company.

Zoë was an inquisitive person; I mean, she was curious. She was curious about the world. She was

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curious about herself. She was curious about EVERYTHING. She was a strong, sturdy little girl, with curly, light brown hair and broad powerful shoulders. She had large hands, with long fingers that seemed to find their way into everything, sooner or later.

She liked to take things apart, which was fine, except that she very often couldn't put them back together. Not entirely, anyway. Her father loved her very much, and he liked to bring home broken gadgets and small appliances and leave them where Zoë could find them. Her mother was an exceptional mother, a champion hiker and swimmer, and she loved to sit outside with Zoë in her lap and watch the trees swaying in the breeze and tell Zoë about her relatives.

Horus was an odd fellow. I mean, he had unusual interests and hobbies, like building small boats for frogs to ride in, and making whistles from fresh willow branches, and trying to see how long he could stand on his head. Horus' father was an archaeologist, and was frequently away in Egypt or Iraq studying ancient civilizations and digging stuff up. His mother was a

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gentle, quiet woman with a winning smile, who loved to tell long, complicated jokes, and could make you happy just by singing to you.

Zoë couldn't remember exactly how or when she'd met Horus. It seemed to her that they'd always been friends, and that was good enough for her. She was a year older than Horus, and he was eight, making her nine, although because his birthday came earlier in the year than hers, he caught up with her for a few months every year.

Horus was fairly bright, and although his taste for adventure was never as strong as Zoë's, he was courageous in his own way, and he was a true and reliable friend. Horus was quite fond of animals - all sorts - and he was forever bringing home creatures from the woods and fields. He would keep them for a day or two, feed them whatever he thought they would eat, and then turn them loose again.

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Author's Note #1 Introductions

The author wishes to express his regrets at not being able to meet you, personally. Perhaps, once you come to know Zoë and Horus, then at least we'll have two friends in common.

Now, there are some people who might think that living in a little village far from the city lights and busy people was rather dull. But it seemed just right to Horus and Zoë. They enjoyed the wind in the trees and the sun on the fields, and the bright and cheerful birds that sang to them every morning. They had clean, warm houses, and good food, and plenty of time to play and think. And, best of all, they had each other.

One day, Zoë came by Horus' house. She didn't say anything right away, but from the look on her face, Horus could tell that something was up.

"You know the woods?" she asked, rather abruptly.

"What?" said Horus.

"The woods," she said again, "the big old gnarly,

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thick, dark woods, down beyond the hayfield, where the creek comes out." She paused, waiting for him to say something.

"Yeah," he sighed. "What about them?"

"There's something *in* them," said Zoë.

"What?" said Horus.

"There's something *in* them," said Zoë.

"What's in them?" said Horus.

"I don't know," said Zoë.

"Me neither," said Horus. "What makes you think *that*?"

"Well..." said Zoë. She clearly had something to say, but she just didn't know how to begin. Horus knew her pretty well, though. He sat quietly and smiled at her, waiting for her to sort it out.

"Well..." she said again, "I had a dream last night. In the dream, there was a little man in a green suit, with

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green shoes, and a green coat, and a round green bowler on his head, and..."

"A leprechaun" said Horus. He'd read a lot of books.

"A LEPER CORN?" asked Zoë.

"No, a *leprechaun*. Little magical folk, from Irish fairy tales." Horus sounded very sure of himself.

"Well, maybe," she agreed. "Anyway, he had short, pointy beard, and was smoking a long, skinny, cream-colored pipe that he held clenched in his teeth, and he had a black iron pot full of gold in his hands."

"Typical," said Horus. "What was he doing?"

"It looked like he was searching for a place to hide the gold," said Zoë.

"Of course," said Horus.

"Maybe in a hole in a tree," said Zoë.

"Uh huh," said Horus.

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“A big, gnarly, dark tree,” said Zoë, growing ever more excited.

“Sure,” said Horus.

“LIKE THE TREES IN THE DARK WOODS!” screamed Zoë.

“So?” asked Horus.

“So?” screamed Zoë. “HORUS, YOU BLOCKHEAD!” She didn’t really mean it. She was just impatient, and beside herself with excitement. “Did it ever occur to you that there might be a treasure hidden deep, just a few steps from your back door, waiting for you to come and find it?”

“I don’t think there’s any treasure in *those* woods,” said Horus. “Owls and spiders, maybe a wolf or two, but no treasure.”

“Let’s find out!” said Zoë, unable to contain herself any longer.

“You mean today?” asked Horus.

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“I mean RIGHT NOW!” Zoë glared at him, and then flashed him a toothy grin. “Are you ready?”

Horus sat still, looking steadily at her. He wasn't in the mood for an adventure, but the chances of talking her out of it, once she got *that* look on her face, were pretty close to zero. “Okay,” he said. “But, if we're going on a journey we need provisions.” Zoë crossed her arms over her chest, and began tapping her toe up and down on the floor.

“We'll only be gone a single day,” she said. Horus disappeared into the kitchen, and emerged a few minutes later.

“Food,” he said, stuffing a couple of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches into his backpack. “Water,” he said, adding a couple of sturdy metal water bottles with screw-on tops. “And shelter,” he said, stuffing two waterproof ponchos and a sweater into the bag.

“Is that it?” asked Zoë. She was ready to go.

“Almost,” he said. “We might not get back until

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after dark.” Horus dropped two compact flashlights into his pack, zipped it up, and threw it on his back. “Okay,” he said turning toward the door, “let’s go!”

Chapter 2 - The Dark Woods

Zoë and Horus closed the back door, and ambled on down the old dirt road that followed the field of tall grass behind Zoë's house to the creek that bordered the woods. Horus was beginning to get into the spirit of the thing, and they both were talking and wondering about what they might find. Things looked pretty exciting until they actually reached the edge of the trees.

"Kinda dark," said Horus.

"Dark, and thick, and spooky!" said Zoë. "The perfect place to find Leper Corns!"

"LE-PRE-CHAUNS," corrected Horus.

"Whatever," said Zoë. "C'mon!" And she stepped from the bright sunlit road into the woods. Horus lost sight of her for a moment, and then followed her into the shadows.

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It was as if they had entered a different world. The trees here were pine, and maple, and elm, and oak, and they were old and tall and close together. The branches grew thick and twisted, and met each other high above their heads, closing out the sun and sky. They could hear the sound of the creek flowing over the rocks, and the calls and whistles of birds high in the trees. There were light green bushes and tangles of blackberries, ferns and mosses. The ground was soft and slightly damp, especially near the trunks of the trees. Occasionally there were mushrooms and other fungus clinging to the roots, and random piles of rocks scattered here and there, with small plants and flowers springing up between the cracks. There were bits of old, crackly leaves and fallen twigs on the ground, and now and then a butterfly or moth fluttered by, catching a ray of sunlight that found its way down through the canopy.

“Beautiful,” said Zoë.

“Eerie,” said Horus.

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Not sure exactly where to start, they decided to follow the creek for a while. Sometimes they stopped suddenly, as a squirrel dashed around behind a tree trunk or a turtle slipped quietly off a stone into the water. Their eyes grew accustomed to the dim light, and the woods seemed quite a bit more alive than they had first thought.

“Let’s see,” said Zoë. “If I were a leprechaun, where would I hide a pot of gold?”

“You’re much too tall to be a leprechaun,” said Horus.

“Don’t be silly,” said Zoë.

“I mean,” said Horus, slightly irritated, “A leprechaun is short, so he’d have to hide the gold pretty near to the ground.” Horus wasn’t given to flashes of brilliance, but he was an observant, practical fellow.

“Right,” said Zoë. “Like, maybe under a pile of rocks, or tucked into a split in a tree trunk, or down a

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rabbit hole.” They both looked around them. Nothing looked promising. They decided to sit down for a bit, so they found a nice old oak tree with broad roots to sit on and leaned their backs against the trunk. They were sitting there together, thinking about what to do next, when a furry grey rabbit scurried by. He stopped, took a nervous look at them, twitched his nose a bit, and then did something most unexpected. He ran full tilt, right at them! They quickly rolled aside, and he zipped between, disappearing down a hole at the base of the very tree they were leaning against!

“Wow!” said Zoë.

“Wow!” said Horus.

“Where’d he go?” said Zoë.

“It looked like he just disappeared,” said Horus, “down that hole.” He pointed at the base of the tree, where the roots split apart. Sure enough, there appeared to be a sort of triangular opening near the ground.

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“Just the sort of place a leprechaun would choose,” said Zoë knowingly, “to stash a pot of gold.”

“Maybe,” said Horus.

“Certainly,” said Zoë. “Let’s have a look.” They crouched down, crawled over to the edge of the hole, and looked down into the darkness. It seemed bottomless. Zoë stuck her head inside.

“What do you see?” asked Horus.

“Not much,” said Zoë. “It’s too dark.”

“Well, what’s it look like?” asked Horus.

“Like a hole.” Zoë had a talent for understatement.

“Let me take a look,” said Horus.

“Alright,” said Zoë, and she pulled her head out. “Whew!” she said, glad to be back in the fresh air again. Horus crawled up, and stuck his head in the hole.

“What do you see?” asked Zoë.

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“Not much,” said Horus.

“Well, what’s it look like?” asked Zoë.

“Like a hole,” said Horus. Suddenly, both of them had a strange feeling. “Déjà vu!” said Horus.

“Déjà what?” said Zoë.

“Never mind,” said Horus. “I can’t see anything, yet.” And he stuck his shoulders into the hole.

“How ‘bout now?” said Zoë.

“A little better,” said Horus. And he stuck his chest in. “The hole continues down quite a ways, out of sight.”

Author's Note #2 Tight Spots

When investigating a tight place, it is prudent to consider not only how to get in, but how to get out as well.

“I wanna see!” said Zoë, and she rushed forward, tripping on a pile of loose vines. She fell forward, and slid into Horus, knocking him deeper into the hole, way

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past his hips. Now he was more in than out. Instead of Horus, there was just a pair of feet, dangling precariously outside the mouth of the hole.

“Hey!” said Horus. “Are you crazy?”

“Sorry,” said Zoë. “Can you see anything, now?” By now, Horus’ eyes had adjusted to the lack of light in the hole.

“Well, yes,” said Horus. “I can see roots, and old dead leaves, a bit of fur here and there, and a lot of dirt.”

“I mean,” said Zoë, not wanting to be rude, “anything *important*. Do you see any treasure?”

“No,” said Horus flatly.

“How about leprechauns?” asked Zoë, still hopeful.

“No,” said Horus.

“Well,” said Zoë, “there must be *some-thing*.”

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“No,” said Horus. “Wait a minute! I see something shiny.”

“Grab it!” squealed Zoë.

“Can’t reach it,” said Horus. “Just a second.” He stretched as far as he could, and his hand closed on an object. “Got it.” He declared.

“What *is* it?” said Zoë, eager to have a look herself.

“Hmmm. It’s shiny, like silver,” said Horus.

“WHAT IS IT?” said Zoë.

“A spoon.” Said Horus. “A silver spoon.”

“Bring it out, so I can see it too,” said Zoë.

“Sure,” said Horus. And he began to wriggle out of the hole. It was at this point he discovered an uncomfortable fact. His body was wedged snugly in the hole, and though he wriggled and squirmed, he was making no progress in returning to the living. “I’m stuck!” he said.

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“Stuck?” asked Zoë, surprised. “Really?”

“Zoë, stop asking questions and get me out of here,” said Horus. “Help!” Zoe stared at the two feet, sticking out of the tree, and began to giggle. “What’s that?” asked Horus.

“What’s what?” asked Zoë.

“That sound,” said Horus. “Are you laughing at me?”

“No,” said Zoë, still giggling.

“Help!” said Horus.

“Okay,” said Zoë. She grabbed hold of Horus’ feet and began to pull.

“Ow!” said Horus. “Easy!”

“Sorry,” said Zoë. She tried again. No sign of improvement, whatsoever. She leaned back, dug in her heels, and really put her weight into it. Horus’ shoes came off in her hands, and she tumbled backward into the weeds, bumping her head on a large rock. “Ow!”

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said Zoë. She crawled back to the hole again. "Are you still there?" asked Zoë.

"You're not helping," said Horus. He was in no immediate danger, as far as either of them knew, but it wasn't comfortable hanging upside down in a dark hole under a tree. "What are we going to do?"

"I don't know," said Zoë. "Let me think." So she sat down on a large root and examined the details of the situation in her mind. "I have it!" she said.

"What?" said Horus.

"Well, we can just wait a few days and let you starve until you get thinner," said Zoë.

"I don't want to starve," said Horus. He was quite fond of meals, and accustomed to three a day, at least.

"Yes, well, neither do I," admitted Zoë. "Let me think some more." She sat down and thought and thought, but nothing occurred to her.

"I could spit," she said at last.

“What?” said Horus.

“I could spit all around the edges of the hole, so you could slide out,” said Zoë.

“I *might* slide farther in,” said Horus, “and disappear altogether.”

“True,” said Zoë. “Hmmm. There must be a way.” She sat for several minutes. Then she sat for several more minutes. “What I need is perspective,” said Zoë. She got up and began to back away from the tree.

“Don’t leave me!” said Horus.

“I’m not leaving, silly,” said Zoë. “I’m just getting a broader view.” And with that, she tripped over the vines again and fell backward, rolling to a stop. “DAMN vines!” she exclaimed. She wasn’t exactly sure what “damn” meant, but her father always said it when something made him angry, so she did too. “If only there was some way to lift you up, we’d have you out of there in no time.” She sat, staring at the pile of vines that she’d just tripped over. What did that remind her of?

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“Aha!” shouted Zoë. “I’ve got it.”

“What?” said Horus. It was lonely and dark in the hole.

“Just you wait,” said Zoë. She grabbed one of the vines and tied one end around Horus’ feet. “Here we go!” she said, and she gave a mighty tug.

“SNAP!” went the vine. Zoë tumbled over backwards again, rolling to a stop.

“I’ll be here *forever*,” said Horus.

“No you won’t,” said Zoë. She picked up three new vines, and began to weave them together into a strong rope. When she had enough, she tied it around Horus’ ankles and tried again. She pulled and pulled and pulled, but Horus was heavier than she was, and she couldn’t budge him.

“It’s okay,” said Horus. “Go home, Zoë. Save yourself. Tell them what happened to me. Maybe someone will shed a tear or two.”

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“Nonsense,” said Zoë. “We’re friends! Just give me a minute to think of another way. Hmmm,” she said.

“What?” said Horus. He was very discouraged.

“I’ve got it,” said Zoë. She took the end of the rope and threw it up over the largest limb of the tree, pulling it back down on the other side. She took up the slack, got a good grip, and pulled straight down, with all her weight. Horus body stretched tight, and then stopped. “I’m just not heavy enough!” exclaimed Zoë. She began to cry, just a little.

“Don’t cry,” said Horus.

“What?” said Zoë.

“Don’t cry,” said Horus. “Find something heavy.”

“Why?” said Zoë.

“Something heavy,” said Horus. “maybe half as heavy as you.” Zoe looked around, and found a large dead limb, broken off during the winter snows.

“Got it.” she said.

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“Lift it up,” said Horus.

“What?” said Zoë. She was listening to him very carefully, but his head was stuck down a hole, after all.

“Lift it up,” said Horus, “and tie the rope around it.” Zoë lifted the limb. It was really heavy! She got it up as high as she could, braced it with her shoulder, and tied the rope around it.

“Got it!” she said. As she relaxed, the rope went taught against Horus weight.

“Jump up and grab it,” said Horus, “and **HOLD ON!**”

“Are you sure about this?” said Zoë.

“**NOW!**” said Horus. Zoë jumped as high as she could, and locked both her arms over the tree limb. Zoë and the limb headed toward the ground, and suddenly Horus’ body came up out of the hole, feet first. She saw his belt, then his shoulders, and finally his head. He was out! Zoë and the limb hit the ground with a loud “**THUMP!**”

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“Are you okay?” asked Horus.

“Nothing broken,” said Zoë. “Are you okay?”

“A few scratches, here and there,” said Horus. He stood up and brushed himself off. The sun was getting low in the west. “Thanks,” he said.

“Race you home!” shouted Zoë, and she took off in the direction they’d first come.

“Right behind you!” shouted Horus.

They were both home in time for supper.

Chapter 3 - Pirates

Zoë and Horus sat in Horus' backyard under the Great Oak Tree. It wasn't called "great" because it was great to sit under on a hot afternoon (though it was). It wasn't called "great" because it could be used to grate cheese or carrots or anything like that (because it couldn't). It wasn't called great because it had children, and they had children, and *they* had children (Zoë's mom had told her on several occasions about her great-grandma Jenny, who had six children, and twelve grandchildren, and LOTS of great-grandchildren, the second great-grandchild being Zoë herself). No, it was called the Great Oak Tree because it was huge, and strong, and shady, and it had been growing there since before Horus' house was built. No one knew exactly how old the Great Oak Tree actually was, but Horus' father was pretty sure that it was the oldest oak tree in all of Wyeknot.

They were sitting on a small quilt, upon which Zoë had placed a basket of fruit, and some cheese and

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crackers, and two small cups and saucers into which she poured tea from a pretty antique teapot of her mother's, the kind with a white glazed body and dark blue pictures around the sides showing scenes of country people from the old days. The tea was Earl Grey, and it was served with chocolate cookies, because she knew how much Horus' loved cookies of any sort. She had just poured the tea, when Horus said something about pirates.

"Those were the days," said Horus, "of high adventure. No 'may I please' or 'if you don't mind' or 'excuse ME'. No sir! A pirate took what he wanted, and gave nothing back."

"Sounds rude," said Zoë.

"Rude?" said Horus. "RUDE? Why, it wasn't polite or rude! That's just how it was. A pirate sailed the seas, stopped other ships whenever he felt like it, and kept the booty for himself."

"What's booty?" asked Zoë. She was both smart and wise, especially for a girl of her years, but Horus'

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had spent hours and hours of his life reading books that described such things, while Zoë preferred to dance with butterflies.

“Why, booty is treasure,” said Horus. Fancy golden plates and expensive silver forks and knives and fine jewelry and –“

“Jewelry?” said Zoë. As I’ve already made plain, Zoë liked treasure, and she was especially fond of jewelry. She never wore very much of it, but she loved to sit sometimes and try on all of the fine bracelets and necklaces and earrings her mom and assorted relatives had given her over the years. Sometimes she even made her own, out of things she found in the woods or leftover parts from the appliances that her father brought home for her to take apart. It was colorful. It was creative. And it was fun.

“Well, what do they do with it?” asked Zoë, returning to the topic at hand.

“They pile it up in big old oak chests and bury it in faraway places so nobody can ever find it,” said Horus.

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“But, what if *they* can’t find the treasure?” said Zoë.

“*They* were the ones who buried it in the first place,” said Horus.

“But, what if they forget where they buried it?” said Zoë.

“They make a treasure map,” said Horus. Honestly, it was shocking how little Zoë knew about things like this.

“But, what if someone finds their map?” said Zoë.

“Well,” said Horus, exasperated, “they don’t just leave the map laying around. They *hide* it, real good.”

“But, what if *they* forget where they hid the map?” said Zoë. It was a perfectly reasonable possibility.

“ZOË!” said Horus, with a little bit of a growl in his voice. He had answered his limit of questions for the day, and was letting Zoë know it. Zoë knew this, of course, and was perfectly willing to let it go. They were

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old friends. She decided to try a different tack.

“Oh, let’s *be* pirates!” said Zoë.

“Great!” said Horus. “I’ll get the sheets!”

“What sheets?” asked Zoë, puzzled. “I thought pirates just slept in their clothes.”

“The sheets aren’t for sleeping,” said Horus. Honestly, sometimes Zoë seemed so dense. “The sheets are for sails.”

“For sale?” said Zoë. “I don’t want to sell any sheets!”

“Sails!” said Horus. “A pirate needs a pirate ship, and a pirate ship needs sails.”

“Well,” said Zoë, “where’s the ship?”. Horus smiled, and pointed his finger straight up.

“There,” he said. “The great oak tree will be our ship. And my mom’s sheets will be the sails.”

“You *can’t* use your mom’s sheets!” cried Zoë.

“She’ll be furious.”

“She’ll never know,” said Horus. We’ll put ‘em back when we’re done. She won’t miss them for one afternoon.”

“I don’t *know*...” said Zoë.

“Let’s get started,” said Horus. Together they began packing away the tea cups and other things. “We’ll need six sheets, a dozen boards, and *lots* of rope.”

Well. The sheets were easy to find. They proceeded to Horus’ mom’s linen closet, and pulled out six clean, nicely folded sheets. The boards were a little harder to find. There were a few lying around in the back yard, along the fence, and a few in Zoe’s dad’s workshop.

“Two more” said Horus. They couldn’t find them anywhere. At length, they went down to the fence in Horus’ back yard, and pried loose a couple of old boards.

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“We’re going to get into *trouble*,” said Zoë.

“We’ll put ‘em back when we’re done,” said Horus.
“Now all we need is rope.”

They looked everywhere for rope. Then Zoë had an idea. They went ‘round to the back of her house, and untied the rope her mom used for hanging out the the clothes to dry.

“Not enough, I reckon,” said Horus.

“Not enough?” asked Zoë.

“I reckon,” said Horus. So they went around behind Horus’ house and untied *his* mom’s clothesline as well.

“We’re going to get into *trouble*,” said Zoë.

“We’ll put it all back, when we’re done,” said Horus. “Really Zoë, stop worryíng and help me get all this stuff up in the oak tree.” They tied their materials in bundles and then climbed up in the tree and hauled it up. They used the boards for planks, nailing them in

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place with a hammer and nails from Zoë's dad's workshop. When they'd established three level decks in the boughs of the tree, they set to work tying rope to the corners of the sheets and rigging the ropes over limbs and down to a central point where they could be tied off.

"Ready," declared Zoë.

"Not ready," said Horus.

"What now?" asked Zoë.

"We need a pirate flag," said Horus. Horus and Zoë rummaged around in Horus' garage and found an old black tarp. "It'll have to do," said Horus. They found a bit of white paint and some old crusty brushes and painted a skull and crossbones on the tarp.

"Ready," declared Horus.

"Not ready," said Zoë.

"What?" asked Horus.

"Can't be a pirate without a *spyglass!*" said Zoë.

Zoë knew more about this pirate business than Horus thought.

“Where are we going to get a spyglass?” asked Horus.

“Right here!” said Zoë, and she reached into an old knothole in the tree and pulled out a perfectly serviceable spyglass, brass trim and all. “My dad’s,” she explained. Horus was impressed.

“Well, it’s my oak tree, so I get to be captain,” said Horus.

“Okay. But it’s my spyglass, so I get to be pilot,” said Zoë.

“Ahoy!” said Horus. “Weigh anchor, and cast off!” They untied the ropes holding them to the picnic table, and hauled up an old washing machine agitator that Zoë had tied with a rope.

“Aye, captain!” said Zoë.

“What view on the horizon?” asked Horus, placing

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a felt hat on his head.

“All clear ahead, captain!” said Zoë, pulling open her dad’s spyglass, and scanning the view over the backyard, and out over the fields.

“Steady as she goes!” said Horus. “Hoist the sails! He and Zoë grabbed the ropes and pulled hard, raising the sheets into the air. The sheets billowed and filled with the afternoon breeze, but held firm as they tied the ropes to a thick branch near the main deck. It was a grand sight.

“Captain!” shouted Zoë. “A merchant ship off the starboard bow!”

“Aye!” shouted Horus. “What colors does she bear?”

“She’s flying a Spanish flag!” shouted Zoë.

“Aye!” shouted Horus. “And she’s heavy with gold, to be sure!”

“Shall we take her?” asked Zoë.

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“Show her our colors!” said Horus. Zoë pulled on the rope, and the pirate flag rose up a nearby limb. “Let them catch sight of the Jolly Roger!”

Author's Note #3 Trouble

It often happens, just when one thinks one might get into trouble, that trouble finally shows up! It's not exactly unexpected, after all.

“WHAT’S GOING ON UP THERE?” It was Horus’ mother. Zoë quickly took a glance with the spyglass.

“Trouble below, captain!” shouted Zoë, pointing to the ground beneath the tree.

“Ahoy!” shouted Horus, hoping for the best.

“Don’t you ‘Ahoy’ me, young man!” said his mother.

“But, I’m the captain!” said Horus.

“Come down here this instant!” said his mother.

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“Yes, Mom,” said Horus. He handed his hat to Zoë, and began climbing down the tree.

“Wait for ME!” said Zoë, setting down the hat and spyglass. She followed Horus to the ground.

“What’s all this then?” said Horus’ mother.

“We’re PIRATES!” said Zoë.

“Oh, hello Zoë!” said his mother. “How *are* you, darling?”

“Fine, Mrs. Heath,” said Zoë.

“And your mother?” said his mother.

“Fine, thank-you,” said Zoë.

“Pirates!” said Horus mother, quite a bit more calmly. “Well, that explains all the shouting, and the rope, and the planks, and the ...” she stopped suddenly, gasping. “HORUS BLUESTONE HEATH,” she screamed, “WHAT ARE MY SHEETS DOING UP IN THAT TREE?”

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“Uh-oh” said Horus.

“Uh-oh” said Zoë.

Author's Note #4 The Truth

When faced with a difficult situation, especially a mess of one's own making, try telling the truth. It probably won't be as bad as you think.

“I tied them up there,” said Horus, shuffling his feet.

“I helped” said Zoë, looking forlornly at the ground.

“Sorry,” said Horus.

“Sorry?” said his mother, still quite agitated. “Well, I should say so! You get right up there and untie those sheets and bring them down.”

“Yes mum,” said Zoë and Horus together. They climbed back up the tree and began dismantling their ship. When they untied and gathered all the sheets together, they carried them to the ground and

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presented them to Horus' mom.

“What a mess!” said his mother. “Now, you two go in the house, and wash these sheets, and hang ‘em out to dry. By the way, what happened to my clothesline?”

“Up there,” said Horus, pointing up at the rope that still held up the pirate flag.

“Hmmm,” said his mother. “I might have known.”

“Are we in trouble?” said Horus.

“You most certainly are,” said his mother. She looked at the two culprits. “I’ll tell you what,” she said.

“What?” they both moaned.

“You put everything back where you found it,” she said, “I mean, *everything*, and maybe then I won’t need to say any more about it.”

“Really?” they said.

“Get busy,” said his mother.

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So, Horus and Zoë took their ship apart, and put the boards and rope back, and put the spyglass and paint brushes away, and washed the sheets and hung them on the restored clothesline. They even nailed the loose planks back to the backyard fence. It took the rest of the afternoon. The sun was low in the west when they collected and folded the clean sheets, brought them to the back door, and presented them to Horus' mom. She took the pile, and looked them over.

“Fair enough!” she said. “Now, sit down.” Horus and Zoë sat at the picnic table in the back yard. Horus' mom appeared a minute later, a steaming hot blueberry pie on a tray, with three fresh white plates. It was Horus' favorite.

“Pirates!” said Horus' mom.

“Let's eat!” said Horus.

Chapter 4 - The Secret

Zoë woke up one morning and went downstairs, where her mom had just placed a nice hot bowl of oatmeal on the checkerboard-covered table in the kitchen. Some cinnamon, brown sugar, and raisins, and just a touch of milk later, Zoë slid into her chair and tucked in with her spoon. She lifted the steaming hot oatmeal to her mouth, and paused to enjoy the aroma. Smelled good! Tasted even better! Her favorite.

After breakfast, Zoë followed her mom around as she tidied this and that, rearranging things here and there.

“What’s up, Ma?” asked Zoë.

“Great-grandma Jenny is coming for a visit,” said her mother. “She’ll be staying with us for a couple of weeks.”

“Really?” said Zoë.

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“Uh huh,” said her mother. “She’s coming clear across the country!”

“Hot dog!” said Zoë. She liked her great-grandma, but hardly ever got to see her, ‘cause she lived so far away. She always looked very nice, and kept her slightly reddish hair short and swept back from her face. She smiled often, especially when she noticed something that reminded her of something or someone that she really liked. She liked to tell Zoë stories about the old days when grandpa was a little boy and she was *his* mom. He got into all kinds of trouble, but it always turned out fine in the end.

Three days later, Zoë was standing in the kitchen sink, looking out the window, when a big yellow taxi pulled up in front of the house. The driver got out, walked briskly around to the other side, and opened the door. A slender and dignified old woman offered him her hand, and stepped out into the morning sun. It was great-grandma Jenny!

The driver stepped around to the back of the cab

and began unloading the suitcases. Zoë hopped down and dashed around to the front, blasting open the screen door as she hurried down the porch steps.

“Great-grandma!” shouted Zoë. She ran to great-grandma Jenny and threw her arms around her in a big hug. Great-grandma Jenny stooped down and hugged her great-grand-daughter warmly and gently.

“Hello Zoë,” she said. Her voice had a little bit of a crackle in it, on account of being over eighty years old, but she was kind and sharp as the day was long. She smiled at Zoë with her eyes, as she took in her surroundings. “Let’s have a look at you.”

Zoe took a few steps back and turned ‘round a couple of times, showing off the dress she’d put on for just this moment.

“What a beauty you are!” exclaimed Great-grandma Jenny. She clapped her hands, and then wrapped her arms around Zoë again and held her close, rocking slowly from side to side. There they stood, the morning warm and still around them. The sunlight

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caught hold of something on Great-grandma's finger and gleamed brightly for just a moment.

"What's that?" asked Zoë, pointing.

"Oh," said Great-grandma Jenny, "that's a ring my Grandma gave me a long time ago, when I was younger than you are now".

"Can I see?" asked Zoë.

"Of course," said Great-grandma Jenny. She turned it a couple of times, then slipped the ring from her finger and handed it to Zoë.

"Wow!" said Zoë. The ring was simple, a thin band of white gold, with a small gem set above it. The gem sparkled with a pale purple light. Zoë stared deeply into the heart of the stone, her mouth falling open with wonder. "What is it? A diamond?"

"Not a diamond," said Great-grandma Jenny, "an amethyst".

"Hammer fist?" said Zoë, looking very puzzled.

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“Oh, child,” laughed Great-grandma Jenny lightly. “Not hammer-fist... *amethyst!* It’s a precious stone. And it’s especially precious to me. It’s the only thing I have to remind me of my Grandmother.”

Author's Note #5 Precious Things

*The value of a thing isn't set by its price,
but by the heart of the one who treasures it.*

Zoë slipped the ring onto her finger. “Oh, Great-grandma!” exclaimed Zoë, “It’s beautiful!” She held her hand up, and let the sunlight play over the facets of the ring. The gem seemed alive with color, and every so often a stray reflection would dance into Zoë’s eyes. She turned it this way and that, admiring it. She thought she’d never seen anything more wonderful.

“Time to go inside,” said Great-grandma Jenny. She held out her hand for her ring. Zoë looked at Great-grandma, and then once more at the beautiful thing on her own finger. She really would have liked to hold it longer. Much longer.

“Here ya go!” said Zoë, slipping the ring from her

finger and placing it in Great-grandma's palm. She smiled weakly, and Great-grandma put the ring back on. The two walked hand in hand into the house to join Zoë's mom.

"Hello you two," said Zoë's mom. She clearly loved the fact that Zoë and Great-grandma got along so well together. "I thought you'd forgotten me entirely!" Everybody smiled.

"No way!" said Zoë, and threw her arms around her mom's neck.

"You are my greatest treasure, in all the world," said Zoë's mom. Zoë had heard it a hundred times before, but she loved hearing it again.

All day Zoë kept thinking about great-grandma, and the ring, and the glittering brilliant rays it cast in the sunlight, and how beautiful it looked on her finger. That afternoon, great-grandma Jenny said she would like a nap, and she headed upstairs to lie down. After a while, Zoë crept upstairs to have a peek at her great-grandma. She could hear her great-grandma snoring

softly, and pushed the door open just a crack to peep in. Sure enough, great-grandma was asleep on the old-fashioned mahogany bed, with the white comforter beneath her and a cozy wool blanket thrown loosely over her, to keep her warm.

Zoë smiled, and was about to close the door, when she caught sight of something shining from the top of the dresser. It was the amethyst ring, twinkling in a stray bit of afternoon sunlight sneaking through the west window. Oh, how the light sparkled and danced around it.

“I’ll just try it on, once more,” thought Zoë, and she tip-toed very quietly into great-grandma’s room, picked up the ring, and slid it on her finger. So beautiful! Zoë stared and stared at the beautiful, glittering object, and then she did something she hadn’t expected. She backed quietly out of the room, ring and all, and softly closed the door. She padded down the stairs to her room and sat down in front of the mirror. The ring looked so amazingly beautiful, and so elegant on her tiny hand, and...

“What have I done?” thought Zoë. “This is isn’t my ring, this is great-grandma’s ring!” Zoë was near panic. “I must take it back at once!” she thought. But she couldn’t. She tried to get up, and head upstairs, but she just couldn’t move. She sat there, not sure what to do. Finally she put the ring in her drawer, and thought maybe she’d think of what to do in a little while. She lay down on her bed, and cried herself to sleep.

A couple hours later, Zoë was awakened by a commotion in the hallway outside her bedroom. She heard her mother and great-grandmother talking excitedly.

“It’s gone!” said great-grandma Jenny with a quivering voice. “I looked everywhere, and I just can’t find it!”

“It’s got to be around here somewhere,” said Zoë’s mom. “We’ll find it, sooner or later.”

“But, it’s the only thing I have left of my grandmother’s things!” cried great-grandma Jenny. Zoë cracked open her door, and saw great-grandma sitting

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in the big old sofa chair. Zoë's mom was holding her hand, kneeling beside her. Great-grandma was crying softly, looking straight ahead. "Oh, what a loss!" she said.

"Oh, no!" thought Zoë "I've nearly broken her heart!" Zoë hadn't thought of any of this when she took the ring. "I'll give it back, right now!" she thought. But she couldn't. She thought about what her great-grandma would think of her. She thought about what her mother would think of her. She got up, and placed the ring inside a rolled up sock, and tucked it into the back of her dresser drawer.

Author's Note #6 Waiting

Some things are worth waiting for, and some things improve with time. But once you realize you've done something wrong, the best time to set it straight is right now.

"Don't worry," said Zoë's mom, "we'll find it. If we have to search every nook and cranny, it's got to be around here somewhere."

"I hope so," said great-grandma Jenny.

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“Every nook and cranny!” thought Zoë. “Why, they’ll search every room, every closet, every cupboard, and every drawer. Egad! They’re sure to find the ring, sooner or later. What will I do?”

She had an idea. If they were going to search the house for the ring, then she’d have to get the ring out of the house. But, where to take it? She didn’t dare lose it, and yet she couldn’t keep it safe herself. She grabbed the rolled up sock, and climbed out the bedroom window. She was at Horus’ back door in under a minute.

“Horus!” shouted Zoë, knocking as loudly as she could. “Horus, are you there?” She heard someone stirring in the house. Then Horus appeared at the door.

“What do you want, Zoë?” said Horus, rubbing his eyes.

“I have a secret!” said Zoë.

“I was enjoying a wonderful afternoon nap,” said Horus. “Why, it’s almost suppertime. What secret, Zoë?”

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“Horus,” said Zoë with urgency in her voice, “I need your help, and you can’t tell anyone!” Well, Horus knew Zoë well enough to spot a genuine emergency. What could possibly have upset her so?

“Come in,” said Horus. They crossed the parlor, climbed the stairs, and stepped into Horus’ bedroom, locking the door behind them. “Now,” said Horus. “Calm down and tell me what this is all about.” Zoë sat on the bed, and told Horus everything. When she had finished her story, she unrolled the sock and showed him the ring.

“What shall I do?” cried Zoë.

“Give it back to her,” said Horus. He reached out and took both of Zoë’s hands. “Right now.”

“You could keep it safe for me,” said Zoë. “Until I find the right moment.”

“No,” said Horus.

“Please!” said Zoë. “Just until tomorrow.” Horus looked again at Zoë. She was really desperate.

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“Alright,” said Horus finally, “but just until tomorrow.”

“*Thank-you!*” exclaimed Zoë. She handed the ring to Horus, gave him a big hug, then scampered home for supper.

Horus put the ring on the lamp table by his bed, and put the matter out of his mind. “It’s only just one day,” he said to himself. But that night, as he was taking a bath, he heard a sudden exclamation.

“What’s this?” asked his mom, entering the bathroom. She held up the ring in front of Horus, who’d just finished drying off and putting his pajamas on.

“Oh, nothing,” said Horus carelessly. He was hoping she’d just let it pass, but he knew better.

“Where’d you get this?” asked his mom. “It’s very unusual.”

“Amethyst,” said Horus. He was thinking as fast as he could.

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“I *know* what it is,” said his mom. “Where’d it come from?”

“Found it,” said Horus. He hated lying, especially to his mom, but he promised Zoë to keep it a secret.

“Where?” said his mom. She was running out of patience.

Well, what to do? He couldn’t lie to his mother, and he couldn’t reveal the secret he’d promised to keep. “At Zoë’s house,” he said looking straight at his mom.

“What?” said Horus’ mom. “Well, who does it belong to?”

“Zoë’s great-grandma,” said Horus.

“Does she know you have it?” asked his mom. He knew it would come to this. He took a deep breath.

“No,” said Horus. “I took it.”

“Took?” said his mom. “Why, Horus Bluestone Heath!” she exclaimed. She was on the verge of tears.

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“First thing in the morning, you’re going over to the Wilson’s house and give it back. You’re going to tell her what you did, and ask forgiveness. What a terrible thing! How could you?” She put the ring on the table, and left the room, crying softly to herself.

Horus tucked himself into bed. Tomorrow would be a hard day.

Zoë woke up the next morning. It was a fine, shiny morning with blue sky and bird song and a warm, sweet breeze wafting in over the fields and idling though the house like a familiar guest. Then Zoë remembered.

“The ring!” she thought. Just then, the doorbell rang. Zoë heard her mother answer the door.

“Oh, hello Horus,” said her mom. “What brings you here so early in the morning?”

“Horus has something to say to great-grandma Jenny,” said Horus’ mom.

“Is that so?” said Mrs. Wilson. She exchanged glances with Mrs. Heath. “Well, come in, come in.” Zoë’s

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mom called up the stairs “Jenny. Jenny! Come down. Horus wants to speak with you.” Great-grandma Jenny had met Horus several times before, but she couldn’t imagine why he’d want to speak to her this early in the morning.

Everyone converged in the parlor. Horus’ mother, Zoë’s mother, and great-grandma Jenny sat quietly on chairs, while Horus and Zoë, who’d just entered the room, stood side by side. Horus approached great-grandma Jenny.

“Great-grandma Jenny,” said Horus. “I have something that doesn’t belong to me.” He stepped forward, and laid the ring in great-grandma Jenny’s outstretched hand. “I took it, you see. I shouldn’t have, but I did. Please forgive me.”

“How could you do such a thing?” asked great-grandma Jenny.

“I don’t know,” said Horus, looking at the floor.

“You’ll spend the next month of Saturdays and

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Sundays, up in your room, thinking of an answer to that question!" said Horus' mom sharply. "I'm ashamed of you, boy." Zoë couldn't take any more.

"Noooooo!" cried Zoë bursting into tears. "Great-grandma," she sobbed, "Horus didn't take your ring. I did." Everyone in the room stared at Zoë. "I took your ring, and made Horus promise not to tell. It's all my fault!" Zoë slid to the floor, and hid her face in her hands. No one said a word.

"Zoë," said great-grandma Jenny, rising to her feet and walking over to Zoë, crouched in a ball on the floor. "Zoë," said great-grandma Jenny, a second time, reaching under and lifting up Zoë's chin. "Zoë," she said, "look at me."

"I'm sorry!" said Zoë. "Oh great-grandma, I'm so sorry!" cried Zoë.

"I forgive you," said great-grandma Jenny. "You took something that didn't belong to you, but you told the truth in the end."

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“I’m a thief!” said Zoë.

“You made a mistake,” said great-grandma Jenny.

“Oh, great-grandma! What shall I do?” said Zoë.

“I have an idea,” said great-grandma Jenny. “This ring needs looking after. I’m getting on in years, and I’m likely to misplace it. Perhaps a younger person could look after it for me. Someone who treasures it just as much as I do. Give me your hand, Zoë.” Zoë looked at her great-grandma’s face, and held her hand out.

“Keep this somewhere safe, and don’t let anything happen to it,” said great-grandma Jenny. She laid the ring in Zoë’s hand and closed her fingers around it.”

“Oh, great-grandma,” said Zoë, “I do love you so!” and she threw her arms around her great-grandma’s neck, and hugged her and kissed her till she thought she’d burst with happiness.

Chapter 5 - Poison

Zoë and Horus went to school at a small schoolhouse in the village. Neither one of them understood why this was necessary, or even useful, but neither minded it very much and it gave them a chance to hang out with the other children, there being just one school in Wyeknot, and just enough children to fill it. Besides, they had the long, warm summers off to spend together on tea parties and great adventures.

One day, a new girl showed up in class.

“What’s your name?” asked Zoë. Before the girl could answer, the teacher spoke up.

“Class,” said Miss Marmalade, “this is Mary. She’s come to us from far, far away. I trust you’ll all make her feel welcome.”

Mary smiled shyly at Zoë. Zoë smiled back, not sure what to say next. Zoë couldn’t remember ever meeting someone from “far, far away.” She looked the

little girl over.

Mary was smaller than Zoë, with dark brown hair pulled back into a ponytail, and dark brown eyes, and pale white skin. Mary's nose was a little crooked, like a picture hung on a wall that just never seems quite straight. And she had really dark eyebrows, and Zoë felt sure that her left ear was slightly higher than her right.

Horus wasted no time. "Hi," said Horus, "I'm Horus". Horus stuck out his hand in friendship, and Mary took it and shook it gently. She said nothing, but just smiled quietly to herself. There was a long silence.

"When did you get here?" said Zoë, trying to make conversation.

"Do you like owls?" asked Mary. It was a sort of unexpected question, but Zoë was enthusiastic.

"Yes!" said Zoë. Zoë was very fond of most creatures, especially wild ones.

"We have a barn owl in our attic," said Horus. "I

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feed him mice, when I can find them!”

Mary and Zoë sighed. Boys were so predictable! You start a conversation about mystery and wonder, and they turn it into blood and guts. “How interesting,” said Mary pleasantly. “I must meet your owl sometime.” Horus beamed with satisfaction. Mary smiled at him. It was then that Zoë felt something she’d never felt before.

Author's Note #7 Jealousy

No matter how much someone likes you, they like others, too. Don't worry. There's enough love to go around.

Zoë smiled weakly. “I’d love to meet your owl, too.” she said. She couldn’t remember Horus having an owl, or saying anything about owls before. Horus thought he saw something in her face he couldn’t quite understand, but decided to let it go. He wondered what he might have said to upset Zoë. She’d never indicated any interest in owls before.

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Mary said “Good-bye” as the bell rang, gathered up her books and hurried out of the classroom and disappeared into the crowded hallway. Horus thought her a slightly strange person, given to abrupt changes in mood and conversation. Nonetheless, he did find her rather attractive in an odd sort of way, and she was interested in some of the things he was interested in, and that was a good start, anyway.

At the day’s end, Zoë was relieved to find that Mary was nowhere in sight, and so she and Horus could walk home quietly together, just like they’d always done before. Zoë wasn’t sure why Mary’s interest in Horus bothered her, but she’d probably learn to like Mary eventually, given a few years’ time.

The next day, Mary sat next to Horus in class. She didn’t say anything during lessons, but had occasion to exchange a few words with Horus now and then. At lunch, she found herself sitting alone at one table. Horus noticed her sitting alone, and thought it would be a friendly gesture to move over and eat lunch with her. He sat down next to her, and in no time they

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were chattering gaily about dogs that bite, crisp autumn apples, and how to choose a perfectly ripe watermelon. Horus never dreamed he'd meet someone who knew so much about so many, many things.

Zoë quickly got up and moved to Mary's table, taking the empty place across from Horus. "I got bitten once," she offered as she took her seat.

"Really!" said Mary. "That must have been very scary."

"Oh, no." said Zoë casually. "It wasn't so bad. Healed up in a couple of weeks. Would you like to see the scars?"

"Maybe, another time." said Mary. Lots of people were a bit squeamish about viewing scars during mealtime. Zoë understood, though she herself never minded seeing a really good cut or scrape, anytime.

Mary was a good speller, and a dedicated butterfly collector. She could jump rope or hopscotch with the best of them, and she even had a fair singing

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voice. The following week, the whole third grade began buzzing about the upcoming annual “spelling bee”. Now, the contest was open to any student, and there was always a pretty good turn-out for the event, since Wyeknot was a small place, and everybody knew everybody. It was exciting - and plain good manners - to come to the Spelling Bee and turn in a good effort yourself or cheer for your chosen champion. And that was where the trouble started.

Zoë was something of a champion at spelling, and had already won the contest twice during her young career. People generally considered her the favorite to win, and Zoë had come to expect this as well. But when Mary showed up at the tryouts, and quickly proved herself by spelling two or three particularly tricky words, Zoë realized that her position at the top was no longer assured.

“Mary is an awesome speller,” said Jake, a tall, lanky boy who lived above the general store. “I think she’ll give you a run for your money, Zoë.”

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“She’s sharp, alright,” said May, a girl about Zoë’s height, with pigtails. May and her family ran the laundry in town. “I wonder why we’ve never met her parents? They must be very proud of her.”

“I heard that she doesn’t have parents,” said Zoë rather suddenly. “In fact,” continued Zoë, “I heard that her mother stole something, and had to go to prison. That’s why she had to leave town, to move here and start over.”

“Heard it from who?” asked Horus. He gave Zoë a critical look.

“Oh, it’s common knowledge,” said Zoë. “Everybody knows it’s true.”

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Author's Note #8 Gossip

Gossip comes in three flavors. One is the story you know isn't true, but you tell it anyway. The second is the story you think might be true, but you don't really know for sure. The third, and most destructive, is a story you know to be true, but will probably hurt the other person. When preparing to gossip, imagine how you'd feel if someone did that to you.

Just then, Mary came by. "Hi," said Mary. Everybody just stared.

"Hi," said Horus, finally. Suddenly everybody had something to do, and they scattered like crows.

"Would you like to swing on the swings?" asked Mary.

"Not right now," said Horus.

"What's wrong?" asked Mary. People were acting a little strange today.

"Zoë said you don't have parents," said Horus, "because your mom stole something and went to prison."

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“Oh!” cried Mary. “It’s starting all over again!”

“What?” asked Horus. He was sorry for what he’d said. Mary covered her face in her hands, and ran away, sobbing.

The next day, Mary wasn’t in class. Miss Marmalade explained that she was home sick with the flu. But she didn’t show up the next day, nor the day after. Finally she came to school again, but she didn’t talk to anyone. She just sat at her desk. Horus figured she’d brighten up during spelling practice. The contest was only two days away. But Mary sat at her desk, and looked out the window.

On the day of the contest, everyone dressed up extra special. Miss Marmalade hung a large banner across the stage in the gym. At ten in the morning, all the classes filed into the gym, and the contest began. Zoë was first, stepping up on the stage and facing the whole school.

“Spell *house*,” said Miss Marmalade.

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“House,” said Zoë. “H-O-U-S-E, house.”

“That is correct,” said Miss Marmalade. Each contestant took their turn. When it was Horus’ turn, he stepped up and smiled. He really liked spelling.

“Spell *watch*,” said Miss Marmalade.

“Watch,” said Horus, “W-A-T-C-H, watch.”

“That is correct,” said Miss Marmalade. The five-letter words were easy, but could be tricky. Finally, it was Mary’s turn. She stepped quietly to the front.

“Spell *happy*,” said Miss Marmalade.

“Happy,” said Mary. “H-A-P...P-Y, happy.” Suddenly she burst into tears, and ran from the stage. Everyone wondered what had happened. Horus looked at Zoë. Zoë thought about what she’d said, and how Mary must be feeling at this very moment. She asked Miss Marmalade to excuse her, and ran out into the hall, looking for Mary.

Mary was nowhere to be seen. Zoë thought to

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herself, “Where would I be if I felt really bad?” She walked down the hall to the girl’s bathroom. Sure enough, Mary was there, crying.

“What’s the trouble?” asked Zoë.

“Everyone thinks my mom is a J-A-I-L-B-I-R-D cried Mary. She looked right at Zoë.

“I don’t think your mom is a jailbird,” said Zoë earnestly. “I’m very sorry for what I said to the others. Why don’t you tell me how it really is for you?” Mary looked up through her tears.

“I used to have a mom and a dad,” said Mary. “We lived in an apartment in the city. My mom used to bake cookies for me, and my dad used to carry me on his shoulders everywhere he went.”

“It sounds lovely,” said Zoë.

“It was great!” said Mary. “Then, one day, my dad just didn’t come home. My mom cried and cried. She got a job at the department store downtown.”

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“I see,” said Zoë.

“Then one day, my mom fell down, as she was cooking dinner. She went to the doctor and –“ Mary stopped.

“What happened?” said Zoë.

“She had an illness. She got a little more tired each day, until she couldn’t get up any longer. Then she died.”

“I’m sorry,” said Zoë.

“I went to live with my grandparents, and then my aunt, and now I live with my uncle, here in Wyeknot. His housekeeper fixes my meals and washes my clothes, but he’s hardly ever around. I feel so alone!” Mary stopped and looked at Zoë. Zoë reached out and took her hand.

“You’re not alone,” said Zoë. She smiled at Mary. Mary smiled back.

“Thanks,” said Mary.

“C’mon,” said Zoë. “Let’s go show them how it’s

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done!” Zoë and Mary walked back to the gym, hand in hand.

And so it went. By the time they got to the eight-letter words, there were only five contestants remaining. It was Jake’s turn.

“Spell *strength*,” said Miss Marmalade.

“Strength,” said Jake. “S-T-R-E-G-N-T-H, strength.”

“That is incorrect,” said Miss Marmalade. Now it was Horus’ turn.

“Strength,” said Horus, S-T-R-E-N-G-T-H, strength.”

“Correct,” said Miss Marmalade. By the time they got to the nine-letter words, only Zoë and Mary remained. No matter how many tricks Miss Marmalade threw at them, they spelled each word perfectly. Everyone grew very excited. Who would win, Zoë or Mary? Then something happened, something that had never happened at the spelling bee before.

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“Spell happiness,” said Miss Marmalade. She looked at Zoë. Zoë looked at Mary, and smiled.

“Happiness,” said Zoë. “F-R-I-E-N-D-S-H-I-P, happiness!”

Miss Marmalade looked confused. “That is incorrect,” she said at last. All eyes were on Mary. “Spell happiness,” said Miss Marmalade.

Mary looked at Zoë, with a huge smile, and said, “Happiness. T-O-G-E-T-H-E-R, happiness”.

“I declare the contest a tie,” said Miss Marmalade.

“The winners!” shouted the kids, and they rushed up to congratulate Mary and Zoë.

That year, for the first time ever, there were two names printed, side-by-side, on the trophy in the trophy case.

Chapter 6 - The Dare

Zoë and Horus were sitting on her front porch one fine autumn day when they spied a boy about their age coming down the road in front of the house. He didn't seem to notice them, but instead just ambled carelessly along, whistling to himself and kicking stones every now and then as he walked.

"Hello!" said Horus.

"Oh, hello," said the stranger. He kept on walking.

"Wait," said Zoë. "Who are you? What are you doing here?"

"Well," said the stranger, "my name is Duke. Duke Charlemagne."

"Charley Main?" said Zoë.

"CHAR-LE-MANE" said Duke. "As for what I'm doing here, I live here."

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“I’m Zoë,” said Zoë.

“I’m Horus,” said Horus.

“Ah yes,” said Duke. “The locals.”

Horus and Zoë exchanged glances. They were pretty sure they’d just been insulted. “I live right here,” said Zoë, “and Horus lives just there.” She pointed in the direction of Horus’ house.

“I live at the Prince William,” said Duke. The Prince William was the fanciest hotel in all of Wyeknot. “We’re staying the summer, to let my mother take the air.”

Horus wasn’t sure, but he’d read stories about royalty taking occasional stays in rural places, to restore their health. “Oh,” said Horus. He couldn’t think of anything else to say.

“I can throw a rock farther than you can,” said Horus.

“No, you can’t,” said Duke calmly.

“Sure I can!” said Horus. He was an excellent

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stone-thrower, well-known around Wyeknot.

“No, you can’t,” said Duke once more.

“Let’s see!” shouted Zoë. She and Horus ran out to meet Duke in the road. Each of them picked up a stone. They all pulled their arms back, and let fly. Zoë’s stone hit first, then Duke’s. Horus’ stone sailed across the road, landing nearly out of sight in the neighboring field.

“Not bad,” admitted Duke. “But I bet I can hit that mailbox on my first try.” Each of them stooped down and picked up a stone. Zoe’s stone swung wide to the left. Horus’ stone flew too high, right over the mailbox. But Duke’s stone struck the mailbox dead on, hard enough that the door flipped open.

“Okay,” admitted Horus. “A good throw, no mistake.” Duke smiled with satisfaction.

“Bet you can’t climb to the top of the Great Oak Tree,” said Zoë. She couldn’t climb to the top of the Great Oak Tree herself, but this boy was acting so

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snooty, she just had to challenge him, somehow.

“Sure I can,” said Duke. “But why would I want to?”

“Are you afraid?” asked Horus. He was a little upset also, and he didn’t like Duke’s attitude one bit.

“It’s not that,” said Duke, very self-assured, “it’s just that we have much larger trees back home.”

“Oh yeah?” said Zoë and Horus together. The force of their irritation startled both of them.

“Certainly,” said Duke.

“I dare ya!” said Horus.

“Oh, someday, perhaps,” sighed Duke. He looked like he was about to continue his walk.

“Right now!” said Horus. “I’ll bet I can climb higher than you can, and faster too.” Zoë was impressed. She and Horus were fond of climbing the Great Oak Tree, but never to the very top.

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“Alright,” said Duke. “Where is it?”

“Right behind my house,” said Horus. And the three of them strode off for the contest.

Author's Note #9 Challenges

It can be fun to compete with ones peers. It's healthy, and gives one perspective. Just be careful it doesn't get out of hand.

In no time, the three of them were standing at the base of the Great Oak Tree, staring up into the maze of branches and leaves between them at the sky above.

“Well, there it is,” said Horus.

“A grand old oak,” said Duke. “I find oak easier to climb than most trees, because of the well-spaced, sturdy branches.”

“Whatever,” said Zoë. “Let's climb!” The three adventurers began climbing the tree. Zoë and Horus had climbed this tree many, many times. Each fork and branch held memories of times gone by. Horus stopped for a moment to remember his pirate adventure with

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Zoë, and to catch his breath.

“What are you waiting for?” asked Duke.

“Memories,” said Horus.

“Race you to the top!” said Zoë, still game.

“Okay!” said Duke. He began climbing at once, and soon they were approaching the top of the tree. Here the branches turned upward, and were much thinner and smoother than the ones below. They came to a stop when their hands could wrap more than half-way around the branches, their feet wedged in the forks.

“Well, here we are!” said Duke. He seemed a little nervous, and out of breath.

“What about the top?” said Horus.

“The branches are too thin,” said Duke.

“I dare you,” said Horus.

“No problem,” said Duke.

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Zoë watched him climb, and then stared at Horus. “Horus,” she whispered, “neither of us has ever climbed higher than we are right now. Maybe you should tell Duke to stop.”

“No way,” said Horus. “He’s so snooty! He’ll stop when the branches begin to bend.”

But Duke didn’t stop. The branches he was holding onto became thin and very springy. The top of the tree swayed in the breeze. But Duke didn’t stop. The main trunk of the tree disappeared, and only a few narrow branches continued upward. But Duke didn’t stop. It was then that something unexpected occurred.

Author's Note #10 Courage

It takes courage to attempt something when you're unsure of the outcome. But, like most things, raw courage, unless balanced by wisdom, can lead to some dangerous situations.

“Crack!” The branch that Duke was holding on to bent sharply to one side, and broke. Duke held on, but now the branch was dangling precariously to one side,

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threatening to snap off altogether and send Duke on a very quick trip to the ground below.

“Help!” said Duke.

“Don’t move,” said Horus. He thought quickly about what to do. “I’ll come get you,” he said. Horus slowly climbed until he was nearly even with Duke, and reached out to grasp his hand. The branch he was holding onto suddenly bent over, nearly throwing Horus to the ground.

“Help!” said Duke.

“Zoë!” called Horus. “I need your help. You’re much lighter than I am. Come up here and take my hand.”

“I dunno,” said Zoë. “What if I fall?” Zoë was plenty brave, but she wasn’t reckless. They were over 30 feet up.

“Help!” said Duke.

“Hang on!” shouted Zoë. She climbed even with

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Horus, and grabbed hold, each of them locking their fingers around the other's wrist. She crept out along a branch, inch by inch, balancing herself by holding onto another branch with her free hand. "Reach for me, Duke!" said Zoë. She was less than three feet away. The branch suddenly swayed beneath her and she swung out over empty space, with nothing but Horus to hold onto.

"Don't let go," she whispered.

"Never," said Horus, and he meant it. He began to swing Zoë back and forth, slowly at first. Her wrist was sweaty, and she began to slip. Horus gripped her tightly, with all his remaining strength. Finally, her feet brushed against a lower limb. She let go of Horus and grabbed hold of the first branch she could reach. Safe!

"Help!" said Duke. The broken branch that held him made a squeaky sound.

"Don't move!" shouted Horus. What could they do? Whatever they were going to do, they'd better act double-quick. "We need help."

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“I’ll go,” said Zoë. She was by far the better runner. “I’ll go and get help, as fast as I can.” She rapidly began climbing down the tree. She reached the ground, and looked up at the two boys. “I’ll be right back!” she shouted.

Zoë thought for a moment. What help could she bring, and where to get it? The fire station in town was only a mile away. She could make it in less than twenty minutes. But that might be too late! She ran to her house. “Dad!” she called “Dad!” As luck would have it, Zoë’s dad was home.

“Horus and Duke are stuck in the Great Oak Tree,” said Zoë. “Duke’s hanging by a broken branch. He might fall any minute.

“Hmmm,” said Zoë’s dad. He always began any problem by saying that. “My ladder isn’t nearly tall enough to rescue him. We’ll need some rope.” And with that, Zoë’s dad disappeared into the garage, returning a minute later with a large coil of strong rope, hanging over one shoulder. “Let’s go!”

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They ran to Horus' backyard, and gazed up at the two boys in the tree. Zoë's dad looked up at the situation, and formed a plan. He was too heavy to climb up himself and rescue Duke, but neither Zoë nor Horus was strong enough to save Duke.

"I have it," said Zoë's dad. He tied a small bowline to make a child-sized loop in the end of the rope. "Zoë, take the end of this rope up to Horus."

"Okay," said Zoë. She took the end from her father and wore it 'round her middle, leaving both hands free for climbing. She scampered up the tree, like a large squirrel, and handed the end to Horus.

"Horus!" shouted Zoë's dad, "Pass the rope over the fork in the branch you're standing on." Horus took the end of the rope and passed it over the fork.

"Okay!" shouted Horus.

"Toss the other end to Duke!" said Zoë's dad.

"Help!" said Duke. He was now genuinely frightened, and desperate to get down.

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“Grab it!” said Horus. He gathered a couple of coils of rope, and threw it out toward Duke. After half-a-dozen throws, the rope landed near enough for Duke to grab it and hold on.

“Pull it around your waist!” said Zoë’s dad. “Pull it tight, pull it sure.”

“Okay,” said Duke, when he’d pulled the loop over both shoulders and snugly around his waist.

“Let go of the branch.” Said Zoë’s dad.

Duke looked doubtful. He looked down, and saw that Zoë’s dad had pulled his end of the rope around his back, and had braced his feet against the tree trunk.

“Let go, Duke!” urged Zoë’s dad. Duke let go of the branch and began to fall. The slack rope went taught, and the rope pulled hard around Duke’s waist. He was now swinging freely in the air, over thirty feet up! Zoë’s dad slowly eased the rope out, and allowed Duke to descend to earth again.

“Hooray!” shouted Zoë and Horus, when Duke’s

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feet touched the ground. Zoë and Horus made their way down, and everyone gathered around Duke.

“You alright?” asked Zoë’s dad.

“Sure,” said Duke. He was still bit shaken by the ordeal.

“What were you kids doing up that high, anyway?” asked Zoë’s dad. Zoë looked at Horus, then they both looked at Duke. “Well?” said Zoë’s dad.

“It was just a bad idea,” said Duke. “Lucky for me you came along!”

Zoë’s dad looked at each them, one by one. Nobody said anything. “Okay,” he said. “Be more careful next time.”

After he’d left, Duke walked over to Zoë and Horus. “Thanks,” he said.

“Never mind,” said Horus. “Let’s find something else to do.”

“Alright,” said Zoë, “as long as we keep both feet

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on the ground.”

Everyone agreed *that* was a good idea

Chapter 7 - Graveyard Ghosts

It was a week until Halloween. Horus decided he'd be a giant skull. Zoë chose to be a Himalayan Sherpa, tumpline, basket, and all! They were in Zoë's kitchen with her mom, carving three plump pumpkins they'd picked out for the occasion.

Zoë had recently advanced from the serrated plastic knife she had used as a small child to a stainless steel steak knife. It was sharp, and a bit scary, but cut much more smoothly and easily than the old one. She had cut the hole in the top for the lid, and was busy spooning out clumps of pumpkin seeds, scraping all of the loose, sticky threads from the inside.

"What fun!" said Zoë's mom. "I love Halloween."

Horus had already scraped his pumpkin clean of all its insides, and was busy cutting two, large, triangular eyes. When it came to pumpkin carving, he was traditional.

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“What shall it be?” said Zoë.

“What are you referring to?” asked Horus. Zoë frequently spoke up near the end of a thought, forgetting that everyone else lacked the benefit of knowing what she was talking about.

“Should it be a happy pumpkín,” asked Zoë, “or a SCARY pumpkín?”

“Pumpkíns should have wide, crooked gríns,” said Horus.

“Everybody gets to make their pumpkín exactly the way they want it,” said Zoë’s mom.

“Maybe I’ll do happy *and* scary,” said Zoë. She began cutting a jagged smile into the face of her pumpkín.

Three days before Halloween, Zoë and Horus were walking home from school together, when Zoë suddenly spoke.

“Whatcha gonna do for Halloween?” asked Zoë.

Horus looked confused.

“What do you mean?” asked Horus. “Why, I’ll dress up, and go house to house, and...”

“Yeah, I know all that,” said Zoë, cutting him off. “Halloween is fun and all that. But, what we need is a real adventure!”

Horus recognized this kind of talk right away. “Zoë,” he said, not unkindly, “let’s just collect as much candy as we can, and get to bed early.” He really didn’t want any more than that. But Zoë was determined.

“Let’s spend the night outside!” exclaimed Zoë, after a brief pause for consideration.

“You mean like, camping?” asked Horus.

“Not at all,” said Zoë. “We need some place really scary.”

“How about my house?” offered Horus.

“Nonsense!” said Zoë. “How about the graveyard?”

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“Absolutely, positively, out of the question,” said Horus firmly.

“But it’s dark, and scary, and there’s all those dead people!” said Zoë. She was beginning to love the idea.

“Zoë,” whined Horus.

“We’ll bring sleeping bags,” said Zoë.

“And flashlights,” said Horus.

“And candles,” said Zoë.

“And snacks,” said Horus.

“And snacks,” agreed Zoë.

“Alright,” said Horus. “But my folks won’t like the idea.”

“You can tell them you’re staying at my house,” said Zoë.

“What about your parents?” objected Horus.

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“I’ll tell them I’m staying at your house!” said Zoë. She clapped her hands with delight. “It’s all settled.”

“Okay,” said Horus. He was going along, for Zoë’s sake, but he had a bad feeling about this.

Author's Note #11 Deception

When planning to deceive someone, especially your parents, you must keep in mind that they were once your age. They have not forgotten.

On Halloween night, Horus stopped by the Wilson’s to stash his gear and connect with Zoë. She was far too excited about their upcoming adventure to be interested in “Trick or Treat”, but she knew Horus loved candy, so she went along with him.

About an hour or so into their journey, Zoë decided that was enough.

“Let’s go,” she said.

“Now?” said Horus.

“Let’s go to the graveyard,” said Zoë.

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So, they returned to Zoë's house, and picked up their sleeping bags and supplies.

"Where are you going?" asked Zoë's mom.

"We're off for a sleep-over at Horus' house," said Zoë.

"Oh," said Zoë's mom. "Alright, see you in the morning. Don't stay up too late."

It was over two miles from Zoë's house to the graveyard, on the near side of town. They walked without talking much, until they came to the gate. It was an old, black, wrought-iron gate, rusted from years of rain and snow. They pushed open the gate, and it made a creaky, creepy sound.

"Are you sure you want to sleep here?" asked Horus.

"Of course," said Zoë.

"Right," said Horus. He opened the gate a little wider, and he and Zoë crept in.

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The graveyard was completely empty - of the living, anyway - and the quiet and the gravestones created a somber atmosphere. Zoë and Horus walked amongst the stones, lit by the full moon, and read the inscriptions.

“Simon St. James, beloved husband and father, Born 1853, Died 1912,” read Horus. “Clair Reynolds, Killed in Car Crash, 1940-1963.”

“Poor Clair,” said Zoë, “only 23 years old when she died. What about that one over there?” Zoë read the name over the grave. “Anthony Newsom, R.I.P” read Zoë. “R-I-P,” said Zoë. “Wow! Maybe he got his heart ripped out!”

“R-I-P,” said Horus, shaking his head. “Rest In Peace.”

“Oh,” said Zoë, slightly disappointed.

“Where do we sleep?” asked Horus. He didn’t look very good. Ghastly pale, and shaky.

“On the ground,” said Zoë, looking critically at

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Horus. He looked like he might throw up, which Zoë was hoping to avoid.

“But there are dead people buried under the ground!” said Horus. He was turning a trifle gray in the cheeks and forehead, a sure sign of trouble.

“We don’t sleep *on* the graves,” said Zoë. “We’ll just lay out our sleeping bags in the pathway between the graves. Don’t want to disrespect the dead.” Zoë was a sensible person, and not the least bit disturbed by minor details.

Author's Note #12 Fear

Fear comes with many faces. It's one thing to face a dangerous creature or a hazardous situation, but it's fear of the unknown that's really hard to take.

The doorbell rang at the Heath residence. Mrs. Heath answered the door. It was Mrs. Wilson.

“Hi,” said Mrs. Wilson. “Sorry to come by so late. I just brought these pajamas over for Zoë.”

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“Pajamas?” asked Mrs. Heath, somewhat puzzled. “Anna, why would you be bringing Zoë’s pajamas over here?” Now it was Mrs. Wilson’s turn to be confused.

“Zoë told us she was spending the night with you,” said Mrs. Wilson. “Where is she?”

“Horus told us,” said Mrs. Heath, “that he was spending the night at your place.”

“What are those two up to?” asked Mrs. Wilson.

“We’d better go looking for them,” said Mrs. Heath. “I’ll get Mr. Heath.”

“I’ll get my husband,” said Mrs. Wilson, and we’ll meet you on the corner, straightaway.”

So, five minutes later, the four parents were standing outside at the corner, wondering where Zoë and Horus might be.

“They took sleeping bags,” said Horus’ dad, “and flashlights.”

“They must be camping out,” said Zoë’s dad.

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“Maybe they’re in the park.” The four set out for town, eagerly looking for their children as they went. When they neared town, they thought they saw lights in the graveyard.

“Hey,” said Horus’ mom, “there are lights moving about in the graveyard over there. What would someone be doing in the graveyard this time of day?”

“Camping!” said Zoë’s mom. She knew her daughter. The four of them slipped through the half-opened gate, stopping behind tombstones as they went to conceal their presence. Presently, they spied the forms of the two children, nestled snugly in their sleeping bags.

“Let’s go haul those two home,” whispered Horus’ mom.

“I think I have a better idea,” whispered Horus’ dad.

Horus and Zoë had tired of reading tombstones and had stretched out their sleeping bags and settled in

to sleep.

“I’m not sleepy,” said Horus.

“Yeah, me too,” admitted Zoë. Just then, they heard a sound. It sounded like a man, moaning.

“Wh-eee-rrre are my ch-iii-lll-dren?” it moaned.

“Did you hear that?” asked Horus.

“Yeah,” said Zoë, genuinely concerned. Then a woman’s voice came from a nearby tombstone.

“Wh-eee-rrre are my sho-ooes?” it moaned.

“Aye ya!” cried Horus and Zoë together. They buried their heads deep in their sleeping bags. After a minute or so, Zoë peeped out, to see if everything was alright. There was nobody around, but their shoes were nowhere in sight! “Horus,” said Zoë slowly. Horus stuck his head outside his sleeping bag, long enough to notice the missing shoes.

“Ghosts!” said Horus. “And they’ve taken our shoes!” They both buried their heads in their sleeping

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bags again. Suddenly they heard a sort of shrieking sound.

“WH-EEE-RRRE IS MY HE-EEE-AAAD?”

several voices shrieked.

Hours and Zoë were up and running, dragging their sleeping bags behind them, flashlights bouncing wildly as they made for the gate. They shot through, and ran halfway home in their stocking feet, before they slowed to a walk.

When they finally reached Horus' house, they were very tired, and relieved to be home safe. They slipped quietly in, and fell asleep in the living room, sleeping bags still wet with dew.

In the morning, not a word was said. Horus followed Zoë to the door, to say good-bye. They opened the front door, and found their shoes, neatly arranged, on the steps outside.

Chapter 8 - The Rocket

Zoë woke up one Saturday morning and felt particularly satisfied with the world. She had no plans to speak of, so she headed over to Horus' house to find out what he was doing on this fine Spring day. She rang the bell, and knocked loudly a couple of times, but got no response whatsoever. So she walked around to the gate, and trudged into the backyard.

"Hello!" said Zoë.

"Hello," said Horus. He was bent down over some contraption in the middle of the garage. Zoë had no idea what it was, but she was always interested in mechanical things, and this thing was definitely mechanical.

"What's that?" asked Zoë.

"A rocket," said Horus.

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Author's Note #13 Imagination

Things are what they are, after all. But with a little imagination, anything is possible.

“Doesn’t look like a rocket,” said Zoë, matter-of-factly. “Looks more like a wagon to me”.

“It may *be* a wagon, at the moment,” said Horus a bit impatiently, “but it will be a rocket when I finish with it. It just needs a few *alterations*.”

“Where do you put in the fuel?” said Zoë, trying to sound knowledgeable.

“No fuel”, said Horus.

“Well, where is the gantry?” asked Zoë. She’d never used that word in a sentence before, and she surprised herself.

“No gantry” said Horus.

“Well,” said Zoë, “how about the fins? A rocket must have fins.” Zoë had never actually seen a rocket before, but she had seen pictures in books and movies.

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“No fins,” said Horus, “not yet, anyway.”

“Well, how are you gonna fly without fins?” asked Zoë.

“This rocket doesn’t fly,” said Horus. “It coasts, downhill.” He appeared to be working on the steering linkage to the wheels.

“Rockets don’t coast,” said Zoë.

“This one does,” said Horus, “or at least it will soon. Pass me those pliers, will you?” Zoë passed him the pliers.

“When will it be ready?” asked Zoë, peering over Horus’ shoulder. She was beginning to get interested in this project.

“Oh, maybe a week or two,” said Horus. One thing you had to give Horus. He knew how to take his time, especially when working on a big project. He was patient, and steady.

“Fine,” said Zoë. She felt she really wasn’t adding

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anything to the project. Horus was completely occupied with his “rocket”. So she left.

When Zoë got home, she wondered what to do. She sat down and tried on the jewelry that she had, some given to her by various relatives, some that she'd made herself. She tried on different combinations, sometimes adding a hat or shoes that she felt might complement the ensemble. She looked at herself, in her mother's full length mirror, turning to one side or the other, and tried on unusual facial expressions or poses just to see how she looked.

It was getting on toward lunch. Her mother came by to look in on her. “What a beautiful girl!” said her mother. “Are you hungry?”

“Yes, I guess so,” said Zoë.

“I'll make you up a nice chicken sandwich,” said her mother.

“Thanks, mom,” said Zoë.

Horus completed his adjustments to the steering

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of his rocket. He'd gotten his wheels from a couple of old wagons, and fastened them to some solid steel axles with cotter pins. The axles were mounted on planks, the rear plank bolted firmly to the chassis, and the front plank on a single large bolt with large flat washers that permitted it to pivot about 30° left or right. The chassis was 5 feet long, ran the length of the car, from front to back. It was made of three sturdy pine boards, bound together with steel straps.

Horus' dad helped him with the design details, but Horus himself cut all the boards, drilled all the holes, and turned all the screws. It had taken weeks, including time spent on drawings and plans that he and his dad had made, but was now beginning to take shape.

Zoë finished her sandwich, and decided to dash back to Horus' house to see how things were going. She found him where she'd left him, still making adjustments, fitting a small steering wheel into place at the front of the "rocket".

"Is that how you steer it?" asked Zoë.

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“Obviously,” said Horus.

“Your car is really great,” said Zoë, enthusiastically.

“It’s not a car,” said Horus. “It’s a rocket.”

“A rocket that coasts downhill,” said Zoë.

“Yes,” said Horus.

“Where do you sit?” asked Zoë.

“There, in the middle, just behind the steering wheel,” said Horus.

“There’s no seat,” said Zoë. She was just trying to be helpful.

“There will be,” said Horus.

“There’s no engine,” said Zoë.

“It coasts,” said Horus.

“It really should have an engine,” said Zoë.

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“Whatever,” said Horus. He didn’t see the point, but he was quite fond of Zoë, so if she thought it needed an engine then he thought an engine would do no harm.

Zoë took his agreement as a mission. The rocket needed an engine, and she was the one to build it. She returned home and began digging through the parts of various home appliances her dad had collected for her to work on. She would build an engine for the rocket, and give it to Horus when it was ready. She found a compressor motor from an old refrigerator, and went to work.

A few days later, Horus invited Zoë to accompany him to the large hill on the west side of town. They walked all the way, towing the “rocket” behind them with a rope that Horus had attached to the front. It came out that Horus had entered his rocket in a race that was scheduled to take place on the very same hill two weeks hence. This would be a test run to “get the kinks out”, as Horus had put it. Horus and Zoë dragged the rocket up the hill, turned it ‘round, and opened the

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“cockpit”, a clear plastic cover that sealed in the pilot and reduced air resistance when in motion.

Horus climbed in. He had on a bicycle helmet and some elbow pads, and a pair of swimming goggles. Zoë closed the cockpit and prepared to remove the blocks under the wheels.

“Ready?” shouted Zoë.

“Ready!” shouted Horus. She began the countdown.

“Ten, nine, eight...” said Zoë. Horus turned and looked straight ahead.

“Seven, six, five...” said Zoë. Horus stared at the long road down the hill before him, and gripped the wheel tightly.

“Four, three, two, one, ignition!” said Zoë.

“Ignition!” said Horus.

“Blast off!” said Zoë, and she pulled the blocks from the rear wheels.

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Horus and the rocket headed down the hill, rapidly gaining speed. The rocket began to bounce around, swerving a bit from side to side. Horus held tight to the wheel, keeping the vehicle pointed as straight as he could manage.

Author's Note #14 The Unexpected

Though things may go as you thought they would, there are often unexpected difficulties along the way. Don't panic. Just keep your nerve and do what you can.

Just when Zoë thought the rocket might tip over, it reached the level ground and shot along the roadway, coasting to a stop. She ran down the hill to catch up with Horus, who was just climbing out when she arrived.

“You okay?” asked Zoë.

“Yep,” said Horus. “What a ride!”

“She bounces around a lot,” said Zoë.

“That she does,” said Horus. “Too light in front.” That gave Zoë an idea. She nearly told Horus, but she

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decided to wait for later. They walked home, pulling the rocket behind them.

The rest of that week, Zoë worked each day on the “engine” for Horus’ rocket. She found a transformer with a lot of heavy copper wire windings, and bolted that onto the motor. Then she got some exhaust parts from an ancient motorcycle, and got her father to help her weld those into place. On the final Sunday before the big race, Zoë loaded her “engine” into a small wagon and pulled it over to Horus’ place.

“Here’s your engine,” said Zoë proudly.

Horus looked at the engine. It was an engine alright, and it certainly resembled the ones he’d seen in old videos of moon launches. He went over and tried to lift it up. It was so-o-oh heavy! “It’s really heavy,” said Horus, trying not to sound ungrateful.

“Exactly,” said Zoë. “It’ll keep the back end from dancing.” She had a way with words, and could be relied upon to say something clear, simple, and to the point.

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“I don’t know,” said Horus.

“Try it,” suggested Zoë.

Horus agreed, so they both lifted the engine and mounted it in the rocket, bolting it securely just behind the pilot’s seat. They towed the rocket to the hill, working rather harder now to get it up to the top. They turned it around, and Horus climbed in as before.

This time, when Horus took off, the rocket rolled away, picking up speed much more quickly than before. Horus noticed the rapid acceleration, and began to worry. Then he noticed something else. The rocket was rolling smooth and straight, with only the slightest vibration and no jumping or dancing at all. Zoë had been right!

He rolled to a stop at the bottom, opened the cockpit, and waited calmly for Zoë to arrive.

“You did it!” said Horus. “Now she rolls smooth and steady, and really fast!” Zoë beamed with satisfaction.

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“You’re ready,” said Zoë.

The next Sunday there were several coaster cars assembled on the hill, lined up and waiting for their chance to turn in the fastest time. Horus was feeling rather confident, and when they rolled his “rocket” into position, he walked right over and climbed in, eager to be underway. They ran the racers two at a time, and when Horus saw the car they’d paired him with, his heart went out to the boy at the wheel.

The other car was just a couple of large fruit crates, nailed together with two-by-fours. The wheels were wobbly, and for steering the boy just had a rope attached to the front axle, that he could pull on to control it.

The two boys got ready. The race official counted down.

“Three, two, one, go!” said the official, and the blocks were pulled from the wheels. Horus’ rocket and the other boy’s car started down the hill, side by side. As they gained speed, the boy’s car began to bounce

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around. Horus rocket sailed ahead. Horus heard a “snap!” and he heard the boy cry out.

“Oh no!” said the boy. The rope he was using for steering had broken, and he was out of control. Horus looked back over his shoulder. He was sure to turn in an excellent time, thanks to Zoë’s engine, but the boy behind him was in real trouble. Horus pulled up lightly on his hand brake, and waited for the boy to come up alongside him.

“Use your feet!” shouted Horus. The boy heard him, and braced his feet against the front axle on either side. He was plenty scared, but at least he’d regained his ability to steer. They were racing down the hill at high speed now, and the boy and his car were bouncing precariously all over the place. Horus thought he might flip at any moment.

“Throw me the rope!” he shouted.

“What?” said the boy. He was really frightened.

“The rope,” repeated Horus. “Throw me the

rope.” The boy gathered up the rope, and tossed it to Horus. The other end was still attached to the runaway car. Horus passed the rope several times around his steering column, then pulled it tighter and tighter until he could practically touch the other boy. Slowly he applied the brake.

The drag from the other car made the rocket unstable, but Horus was able to gradually bring both cars to a stop. He and the boy breathed a sigh of relief, and just sat there as everyone else rushed over to see if they were okay.

“You saved me,” said the boy.

“It was nothing,” said Horus.

“Thanks,” said the boy, looking up at Horus.

“You’re welcome,” said Horus.

That evening, Horus and Zoë were sitting and eating ice cream together, when the topic of the race came up.

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“What was your time?” asked Zoë.

“Didn’t even qualify,” said Horus. “But I still won.”

He and Zoë smiled at each other, and sat and finished their ice cream.

Chapter 9 - Accidental Journey

Horus had always been curious about his father's expeditions. Mr. Heath would often be gone for several weeks, and Horus used to wonder what new story or artifact his father would bring home with him when he returned. One summer, Horus and his father decided to take a trip together. Horus had just turned eight, and his father judged that it was time for Horus to see the world. He booked a trip for two, to Egypt, Jordan, and the Holy Land. He bought Horus some travelling clothes, including a broad-rimmed canvas hat, the kind that you could easily stuff into a knapsack, and pull it out along the way.

Zoë hadn't spent much time alone. She and her best friend Horus always had something interesting to do. They shared their adventures, and their dreams, and whatever came to mind. That summer Zoë found herself turning to one side to tell Horus about a particularly fine idea she'd had, only to remember that he was away, and beyond any contact until his return six

weeks hence.

Zoë didn't know what to do with herself. She climbed the Great Oak Tree, and tried on jewelry, and sat on the porch in the afternoons, having long luxurious conversations with her mother. Occasionally, Mrs. Heath would drop by and the three of them would sit together and imagine what Horus and his dad were up to.

"I wonder where they are," said Zoë.

"They must be meeting strange people, and enjoying all kinds of unusual situations," said Zoë's mom.

"He said he planned to take Horus to see the great pyramid at Giza," said Mrs. Heath. "I climbed it myself, once, a long time ago."

"Really?" said Zoë.

"Oh yes," said Mrs. Heath. "Mr. Heath and I weren't married then. We had to bribe the guards to be allowed to scale the pyramid and spend the night."

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“I wish I could do something exciting,” said Zoë.

“Oh Zoë, dear,” said her mom. “You’ve got your whole life ahead of you. You have many adventures waiting for you. You’ll see.”

They sat and watched the humming birds come and drink from the sugar-water feeders that Zoë’s mom put out, just for that purpose.

Author's Note #15 Adventures

*Adventures can happen anywhere, anytime.
You only have to be willing to let it happen.
You have choices to make. Follow your heart.*

Zoë wasn’t so sure about adventures. She and Horus had had some unusual experiences, certainly. But what about a really BIG adventure? She excused herself and decided to walk into town.

When she got there, she realized that she had no plan. I mean, town was just “town”. She’d seen it before, she’d see it again. What was unusual today was a large truck with a trailer behind. The trailer had a brightly painted banner alongside, that read:

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“Marvelous Majestic Mystery Circus”

“What,” thought Zoë, “is a Marvelous Majestic Mystery Circus?”

She went around to the truck cab, and found a big, boisterous man with a thick black beard.

“Hello miss,” he said. He was a wild man, strong and free, but he had a kindly smile and a single silver earring.

“Hello,” said Zoë politely. “What’s a Marvelous Majestic Mystery Circus?” asked Zoë.

“It’s a travelling show,” said the man. “I’m Jasper. Who might you be?”

“I’m Zoë,” said Zoë.

“Pleased to meet you,” said Jasper. “Our circus is a travelling circus. We put up the tents, thrill the crowd, and then move on.”

Seemed simple enough. Zoë was excited.

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“How can I see your circus?” asked Zoë.

“No more shows at this stop,” said Jasper. “We’re all packed and ready to move north tonight. By tomorrow evening, we’ll be a hundred miles from this place.”

“Couldn’t I just have a peek?” asked Zoë. She was very curious.

“Well,” said said Jasper, I’ll see what I can do.” He got down from the cab of the truck, and came alongside, and began unlocking a side door on the trailer. In a minute or two, the lock was opened, and he swung open the door.

“It’s dark inside,” said Zoë.

“Well, here now, just a moment,” said Jasper. He walked around front again and started a generator motor at the front of the trailer. “Now whaddya see?” he asked.

Zoe gasped. There were brightly colored platforms, trapeze and high-wire apparatus, and a

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fantastic assortment of costumes and sparkles and feathers. She looked up at Jasper. He smiled, and motioned for her to step inside.

It was another world, all taken apart and packed up, but it was all there. Zoë imagined a beautiful woman, in a glittering costume, sailing through the air high above the crowd. There were large balls, an assortment of caged dogs, and even the ringmaster's coat, tails, and top hat. Just then, Zoë got the uncomfortable feeling she was being watched. She looked up high in the corner and spotted a pair of eyes, following her every move.

"Eeek!" said Zoë, pointing at the eyes.

"Oh, that's Samantha," said Jasper. "She's an ocelot."

"OS-A-WHAT?" asked Zoë, never taking her eyes off the beast.

"Ocelot. Small, wild cat. Quite tame, really."

Zoë wasn't too sure. But it was time to go. She

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and Jasper stepped out into the street again.

“Come see us, next time we’re in Wyeknot,” said Jasper. With a friendly wave he turned back to answer a call on the truck’s radio. When he returned, Zoë was nowhere in sight. He closed the doors, and replaced the lock.

That evening, just as Jasper had said, the truck pulled out, headed north. But it had an extra feature that Jasper didn’t know about. At least, not yet.

Zoë had been so curious. When Jasper turned to answer the radio, she slipped back inside the truck for a last look. She tripped over a metal frame, hit her head against a large magician’s cabinet, and the world went black. When she awoke, she was startled to find herself in complete darkness.

“Oh my!” thought Zoë. “I’m locked inside the trailer!” She couldn’t see anything. She sat still, wondering what to do next. She could feel the rumbling of the truck as it rolled along the roadway.

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“Jasper!” she called. “Jasper, help! I’m in *here*, Jasper, in the back of the truck. Let me out!”

Author's Note #16 Panic

It's easy to become frightened in unexpected circumstances. Just focus on what you have to do right now, and leave the rest 'till later.

She listened for a response, any response. All there was was the rumble of the truck as it sped along, and the perfect blackness of the trailer as Zoë bounced along with it. She began to cry. Would she die there, trapped accidentally and suffocated to death?

Zoë took a deep breath, and said to herself “Hmmm.” It was what her father always said when trying to solve a puzzle. Well, she was trapped, and nobody could hear her call. If she was going to suffocate, it would’ve happened by now, so there must be enough air to breathe. So, she was otherwise alright, no immediate danger. But it was so dark!

Then she remembered. Jasper had switched on a

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light when he was showing her the trailer, maybe she could find the switch. She began to make her way to the corner where she thought she remembered the switch would be. Then she noticed two glowing eyes in the corner of the room. Samantha! Overcoming her fear, she realized that Samantha's cage was right next to the light switch. She made for the two glowing eyes, feeling her way around obstacles, until she was directly below. She reached up, and her hand brushed the light switch. She pushed up on the switch, and the light came on.

"Thanks, Samantha!" said Zoë. Now that there was light, things were looking more hopeful. Zoë scanned the room, found some of the floor pads used by the acrobats, and sank into them. Comfortable at last, she gazed dreamily at her surroundings. "Nothing to do but wait 'till morning," she thought. She didn't know what time of day it was, there being no windows in the trailer, but she figured that when the truck came to a stop, it would be morning. She laid back into the padding, and fell asleep.

Sure enough, the truck came to a stop the

following morning. She awoke when the steady rumble of the road abruptly came to an end, and everything ground to a halt. She picked up a short pole that she imagined the high-wire artist used for balance, and began to beat loudly on the front wall of the trailer. There was a shuffling and clanking outside, and suddenly the door swung open.

“Well, what have we here?” said Jasper. He was startled to find the light on, and even more surprised when he saw Zoë. “Why, miss Zoë, what are you doing here?”

“I tripped and hit my head,” said Zoë. “I just had to have one last look inside. I’m very sorry.” Jasper looked a bit upset, but he soon broke into a smile.

“Well,” said Jasper. “No harm done. But, we need to get you home.” The truck was parked outside a diner. Jasper took Zoë’s hand and led her into the diner to a table by the window. A middle-aged waitress in a turquoise uniform stopped to take their order.

“What’ll it be?” she asked. Zoë was beginning to

feel a bit better.

“Could I please have a hamburger, some onion rings and a big chocolate malt?” asked Zoë. The waitress scribbled on her order pad.

“How about you, sir?” she asked.

“Make that *two* of everything,” said Jasper. The waitress disappeared into the kitchen. “Now, how about you give me your parents’ phone number?” he asked Zoë. Zoë wrote it down on a paper napkin, and handed it to Jasper.

“Don’t budge,” said Jasper. “I’ll be right back.” He got up from the table, and headed off in search of a pay phone. When he got back he had some good news to tell.

“Well, I got hold of your mum,” said Jasper. “They’ve been worrying about you since suppertime yesterday. They’re coming alright, but it’ll take ‘em five hours to get here, so we’d best get comfortable.” He settled back in his seat, and drank some coffee.

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The food came and Zoë happily gobbled her burger and rings. She was hungry! “Where are we?” she asked.

“Well, we’re nearly to Liverpool,” said Jasper. “But it’s a good road ‘tween here and Wyeknot. Your folks will be along, soon enough.”

“Do you have any children?” asked Zoë.

“I have a son, and a daughter, not much older than you are,” said Jasper. “But, I don’t see them often. Their mother and I divorced a few years back, and I spend most of my time travelling with the circus.”

“Too bad,” said Zoë. “My dad is away quite a bit, but I’m always happy when he comes home.”

“As it should be,” said Jasper. He was quiet for a time. Zoë finished her meal, and Jasper made a big pillow out of their coats. The waitress nodded approvingly, and Zoë curled up in the corner of the booth and fell asleep.

“Zoë,” said a soft voice. “Zoë darling. Wake up.

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It's time to take you home." It was her mother. Her dad was there too, talking with Jasper.

"Thanks for looking after our Zoë", said Mr. Wilson.

"Oh, it was nothing," said Jasper. "She just got caught up in a little adventure, entirely by mistake. She's a brave lass, that one!"

"So she is," said Mrs. Wilson. "But it's time to be going home now."

"Good-bye, Jasper," said Zoë.

"Good-bye, miss," said Jasper.

And with that, Zoë and her parents turned, and headed for home.

Chapter 10 - Bad Dog

Horus had other friends besides Zoë. Even though Zoë was far and away his very best friend, he sometimes spent time with boys his age. They had similar interests. It was great fun, for example, to gather at the bank of the river Wye on a hot summer's day and take a running leap into the cool water.

Pete was a year older than Horus. Pete and his family had a house in town, right on the river, and sometimes Horus and Pete would spend mornings reading stories or comic books up in Pete's room and then relax by the river in the afternoon, taking advantage of the rope that Pete's father had tied to a large tree limb that hung out over the water. Horus would grab the rope as high as he could reach, run down the hill, and swing out over the river, letting go just in time to drop into a particularly deep hole in the river's bottom.

"Sure is a hot one," said Pete one day. Actually,

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he often made comments about the weather.

“Sure is,” agreed Horus.

Author's Note #17 The Weather

People talk about the weather, even though it's impossible to miss and there's nothing anyone can do about it.

“Say,” said Pete, taking hold of the rope swing, “I’m going on vacation soon. I’ll be away a fortnight.”

“Sounds great!” said Horus. He stood up as Pete swung out and plopped into the river. Horus caught the rope as it swung back in, gripped it tightly, took a big run, and swung out over the river, the murky surface gleaming in the afternoon sun.

“Splash!” went Horus into the river. The two boys swam leisurely in the shallows, dipping down until just their heads were showing.

“Howdja like to take my paper route while I’m gone?” asked Pete.

“What do you mean?” asked Horus.

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“It’s easy,” said Pete. “You just ride around on your bike and deliver the newspaper.”

“I dunno,” said Horus.

“You can even make a little money while I’m gone,” said Pete. “You can keep my share of the collections. Once a week you collect the money for the paper. You go to the front door and say ‘Collect!’ They bring the money to the door and put it in your hand. It’s easy!”

“Alright,” said Horus. He really didn’t care about the money, but he wanted to help his friend Pete. Besides, he thought it might be fun.

So, a couple of weeks later, Horus found himself riding the streets on his bicycle with a saddlebag full of newspapers. Pete had taught him the route, and written down the house numbers on a piece of paper that Horus had in his back pocket. Most times, Horus could just throw the paper up on the porch or doorstep. Sometimes, he’d have to get off, and climb some stairs or walk a narrow alley to get to the door. And one time, he met a bad dog.

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Author's Note #18 Dogs

Dogs are, by and large, friendly, even to strangers. They do, however, seem to have an abiding mistrust of mailmen and newsboys.

Pete had warned Horus that he could expect an occasional dog to come after him. Mostly, if you stood your ground, and spoke as if you were old friends, the dog would settle for a good shoulder rub or some scratching 'round their ears. Even unfriendly dogs would usually just bark loudly and defend their turf.

Horus had spied a large Dalmatian a time or two that played with the children out in the front yard. He'd seen what might be a menacing look in the dog's eyes, but came and went without incident, and thought no more about it. On Saturday, he climbed the three steps to the front porch, knocked three times on the screen door, and said "Collect!".

The oldest of the children, a girl of twelve in a pink t-shirt and a dirty blonde ponytail, came to the door. The Dalmatian was there too, growling menacingly, and two of the younger children had hold of his collar,

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holding him back. The oldest counted out the money, and had cracked open the screen door to hand it to Horus when the dog suddenly lunged forward. The screen door flew open, knocking Horus backwards over the porch rail.

He landed on his back in the grass, with the dog on his chest, snapping and dodging, trying to bite Horus in the throat. Instinctively, Horus got his fists up in front of him, and kept the dog at bay, occasionally striking him right on the tip of his nose. Failing to reach his throat, the dog settled for his leg, and bit down hard on Horus' thigh.

The children pulled the dog from Horus' chest. He got to his feet and made a hasty retreat back to the road, where he pulled down his jeans. Two red holes showed on his bare thigh where the dog's teeth had sunk in. He hurried home, and told his folks what had happened.

Horus' father was concerned. The bite wasn't bad. Two neat holes, nothing more. What worried him

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was whether or not the dog had been properly vaccinated against rabies. He washed the wound, and took Horus' with him in the car to the house where he'd been bitten.

When they got there, both parents were home. They were quite upset about what had happened, and immediately apologized. Horus' dad inquired, and soon discovered that the dog had had all of the proper shots, so there was no serious harm done. That being settled, Horus and his dad headed home. But Horus would have to deliver the paper the next day.

The Sunday paper was particularly heavy, and Horus' bicycle was loaded. He approached the house with the Dalmatian, and found the dog was already out in the front yard. The dog saw Horus, and came running, barking and jumping. But Horus had come prepared. He had a small plastic squirt gun, filled with ammonia from his mom's laundry supplies. He waited patiently for the dog to arrive, and gave him a couple of squirts of ammonia, right between the eyes. The dog howled, and beat a hasty retreat. Horus smiled, and

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finished delivering the papers.

When Pete returned from vacation, he wanted to know how things had gone. “How’d you get on, delivering papers for two whole weeks?” asked Pete.

“Very educational,” said Horus.

Chapter 11 - High Tea

Horus and Zoë liked to have tea parties in Horus' backyard from time to time. Though Zoë was mostly responsible for setting these up, they were always held at Horus' house, on account of the Great Oak Tree, which provided shade and a sense of grandeur.

Zoë had just finished reading *Alice In Wonderland*, and found the concept of "High Tea" to be particularly interesting. She brought it up the next time she and Horus got together.

"Have you heard of High Tea?" asked Zoë.

"You mean, like a tea party?" said Horus.

"Not at all," said Zoë. "I mean a **SERIOUS** tea party, with formal dress, and all the proper tableware."

"Sounds stuffy," said Horus. He was never one to adhere to details, when it came to society. He preferred a relaxed, informal attitude toward one's conduct with

others, and with life in general.

“I don’t see any reason,” continued Zoë, “why it should be stuffy. It’s about a sense of charm and ceremony.”

Horus didn’t like the sound of this, but Zoë was his best friend, and he could hear in her voice that she was very keen to explore the idea. “Well, what would it be like?” he asked.

“Well,” said Zoë, brightening noticeably, “there would be small cakes and cookies, and savory meat dishes and pies, and tea, of course.” Horus pictured the spread in his mind. He and Zoë sitting on a blanket under the Great Oak Tree amidst lots of tasty tidbits.

Author's Note #19 Anticipation

We often picture how things will be in the future. Generally, what actually happens is quite different.

“Alright then,” said Zoë. “I’ll get started on the guest list, and you start rounding up tableware.”

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“Tableware!” said Horus. “Where am I going to find tableware?”

“The same place EVERYONE finds tableware. Kitchen cupboards, china cabinets, here and there...”

“Our mothers won’t let us use their fine china!” said Horus. “No way!”

“Oh, they’ll be invited, of course,” said Zoë. “It’s all in how you present things.”

Horus was dubious, but he didn’t want to leave all the work to Zoë. His mom could surely part with a few dishes for an afternoon. He would find a way.

Invitations were another matter. Zoë wanted everything to be in order, and she didn’t want to leave anyone out. Right away she came upon a snag.

Priscilla Pots asked about bringing her cat. She said she’d love to attend, but wouldn’t think of leaving “Boots” behind. Her cat was called “Boots” because she was black and white in various places, but her two hind feet were pure white, which made her look like she

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was wearing boots.

“Pets!” thought Zoë. “At a tea party?” Unconventional, to be sure, but Zoë couldn’t think of any particularly strong reason why pets couldn’t attend, properly washed and attired, of course.

Zoë also wanted there to be roughly the same number of boys and girls, but found there was a genuine shortage of boys that she knew who would attend a tea party. She thought the matter over for a couple of days. “It’s all in how you present things,” she thought. She finally decided on alternate invitations for the boys.

Author's Note #20 Presentation

It is a surprising fact that people react to things not as they are, but as they are presented. People will warm to almost anything, if it is presented in the right way. Try it.

The girls’ invitations went like this:

Your presence is politely requested at High Tea, on the twenty-seventh of May, at 4pm. Tea and snacks will be

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served, formal attire recommended.

The boys invitations went like this:

May Madness! Come to the afternoon roundup beneath the Great Oak Tree. Food and tea provided. Dress up, put on your best and be with the rest!

“That should do it,” thought Zoë. “Now, what to do about the pets? Can’t just have a bunch of animals, damaging the decorum.” She thought and thought again, and then she had an idea. She attached an addendum to the invitations, which went as follows:

Pets welcome, properly attired. All animals present must have a proper collar, at a minimum. Hats strongly encouraged.

“It’ll be grand,” thought Zoë.

Well, the responses trickled in, one by one, but a week before the great event, Horus was still without the proper table settings.

“Horus!” said Zoë, not unkindly, we really need that stuff.

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“I know,” agreed Horus, dropping his head a little. “When I asked my mom, she brought up our recent career as pirates.”

“We’ll ask again, together,” said Zoë. Zoë and Horus headed over to his house.

When they arrived, Mrs. Heath was just finishing up some dishes in the kitchen. When she saw the two of them, she knew exactly what was up.

“I know what you’re going to say,” said Mrs. Heath, “and the answer’s still no.” She wasn’t angry, but she had made up her mind on this issue.

“But,” said Zoë, “it’ll be lovely. Just think of all those boys and girls sitting down together for a proper tea.” She hoped Horus hadn’t mentioned the presence of dogs and cats at the party.

“Zoë,” said Mrs. Heath. “you know I’d do almost anything for you, but...”

“It wouldn’t be any of your really fine china,” said Zoë quickly, “just some nice tableware and dishes. My

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mom's going to lend us some..."

"Zoë..." interrupted Mrs. Heath.

"I mean," said Zoë, apologetically, "she might loan us some dishes, if you do too."

"Oh, I suppose I can spare a few things for an afternoon," sighed Mrs. Heath. "Lord knows, it's hard to say no to you two."

A week before the High Tea, Zoë reviewed the situation. Of the twelve children who'd attend, over half of them intended to bring their pets.

"Oh, bother!" thought Zoë. "All those dogs and cats! What have I created?" Nonetheless, she was very excited about the prospect of the upcoming event, and overall she felt confident that things would turn out well.

On the day of the party, Zoë and Horus gathered together all of the teacups and saucers, plates and silverware in a small wheelbarrow and brought them to the level spot beneath the Great Oak Tree. Zoë spread a large checkerboard quilt out on the ground, upon

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which she laid a pure white linen tablecloth. They set places for twelve, and began bringing in the tea and snacks. Mrs. Wilson had provided scones and strawberry tarts, and Mrs. Heath had provided some savory meat pies and some cheese and biscuits. Once the places had been set, they both stood back and looked out over the arrangement.

“Needs flowers,” said Horus, and he clipped a few from his mother’s garden and placed them in the center.

“Truly lovely,” said Zoë, feeling very satisfied with herself.

At about 3:45pm, guests began to trickle in. The first to arrive was Priscilla Pots, with her cat “Boots”. She wore an elaborate lace dress, all in white, with a small white parasol.

“Quite nice,” said Priscilla. “I hope you invited the right sort of people.” She sat down on the ground and proceeded to stroke her cat in the shade.

Next to show was Horus’ buddy Jake.

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“Wanted to get here early,” explained Jake. “To enjoy the fancy eats!” He sat down, right next to Priscilla, who seemed mildly annoyed. “What do you think of this High Tea?” he began. When she didn’t answer, he decided to try again. “I’m Jake,” he said.

“Charmed.” Said Priscilla flatly. It wasn’t personal. In a town as small as Wyeknot, they’d spotted each other now and then, but they’d never actually spoken. “I’m Priscilla, Pricilla Pots.”

The Standish twins, Cindy and Sandra were next to arrive. They were accompanied by a small Pomeranian with reddish fur. They seated themselves across the quilt from Priscilla and Jake.

“Hello,” they said in unison. “We heard that pets were invited, so we brought Zsa Zsa along.” The Pomeranian looked out from beneath her pink polka-dotted bonnet and eyed Boots the Cat. Her upper lip curled a little, baring her teeth.

Next came John Little and his younger brother, James. They took their places at the far end of the

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quilt, and set a large German chocolate cake with rich, dark brown icing, in the center. “My mum made it,” said John. “If its one thing my mum knows, it’s cake.” Their dog, a sleek black Labrador named Gunther, curled up comfortably just behind them, and looked like he might go to sleep. The boys had placed a festive collar on their dog, which he tolerated good-naturedly, but it made him look a little like the “Beefeaters” in London.

Mary came in quietly, smiled broadly at Zoë. “What a beautiful tea!” said Mary enthusiastically. She had a deep dish crowded with Cornish pasties, which she placed near the empty place at the head of the quilt. She sat at the corner next to Jake, who was glad to find that she was interested in conversation.

Joe Masters shuffled in, looking a bit embarrassed. “I didn’t bring any snacks,” he said, but I have a few sweets. With that, he emptied both of his pockets, and gathered up several pieces of candy that had fallen out. He sat down next to the twins. “Here Spot,” said Joe, and he whistled once. A medium-sized Dalmatian came ‘round, licked his face, and sat down

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beside him. Joe placed a red plastic fireman's hat on Spot, which looked rather appropriate.

“Lovely,” said Zoë thoughtfully, and she took the candies from Joe and arranged them attractively on a small white dish.

Lily Stonegarden showed up shortly after, carrying a basket of assorted cookies and biscuits, which she set alongside the cake, and then snuggled in between the two brothers. She had brought along “Captain Jack”, a blue-green parrot with a saucy vocabulary, perched comfortably on her right shoulder. John and James watched the parrot rather nervously, especially his sharp beak.

Zoë took the place at the “head” of the quilt, next to Mary. Horus helped her place a large tea service on a silver tray near the head of the quilt, where Zoë could reach it and “pour out” tea.

Duke Charlemagne arrived stylishly late, with a tin of expensive chocolates from Sweden. He was impeccably dressed, with a bow-tie and waistcoat and

jacket. He took a seat next to Zoë, and Horus took the only seat left, next to Priscilla.

“Well,” said Zoë, looking out over the assembly, “we’re all here. Welcome!” She bowed slightly and reached for the large teapot. “Let’s have some tea, shall we?” Zoë began pouring tea into some rather fancy china cups and saucers, and passed the cups around.

“The tea is just right!” said Mary, taking a sip after everyone had been served. She took a large turtle from a pocket in her apron, and placed him on the quilt in front of her. “I call him Tut Tut,” said Mary, and the turtle started off, walking across the tablecloth.

Priscilla sipped her tea, and putting Boots down on the quilt, plucked a biscuit from the tray. “Boots and I adore parties,” said Priscilla. Boots began to walk back and forth in front of Priscilla, glaring up at Zsa Zsa and purring to herself. She turned away, and began to lick her paws.

Zsa Zsa had seen enough. Her temper flared, and

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she leaped over the spread, mouth wide, teeth flashing, intent on giving Boots a good nip or two. Horus saw what was happening, and instantly sprang into action, scooping up the startled cat and jumping to his feet to protect her.

Gunther, who'd been on the edge of a very nice nap, awoke to the commotion nearby and ran forward. His leash was still wrapped around John's wrist, and as he rounded the corner the leash pressed hard against Priscilla's back. She fell forward, and landed, face-first, in the chocolate cake.

The twins scurried around, trying to control Zsa Zsa, while "Captain Jack" the parrot, flew to the safety of a low hanging branch in the tree above. Priscilla sat up, her face and chest now covered in dark brown icing, and began to cry. Lily observed the going's on, and giggled, in spite of herself. Spot saw his opportunity and shaking his fireman's hat off, proceed to sample some of the meat pies nearest him.

Jake, tried to get hold of Zsa Zsa and succeeded

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in stepping on Duke's box of Swedish chocolates. He lost his balance and fell, knocking over several teacups leaving a large dent in the tin. Zoë, surveyed the scene in total disbelief as the tea party unraveled in pandemonium.

Mary grabbed a large cloth napkin and led Priscilla inside to help her get cleaned up. By the time the two girls returned, the animals had been controlled and people had returned to their seats. Zoë was dumbstruck.

"Where's Tut Tut?" asked Mary. They looked down, and saw the fireman's hat slowly making its way across the disaster. Joe reached over, and lifting the hat, revealed the turtle, undisturbed, still going for a walk.

"Well, that's a party to remember!" said Zoë. Everyone laughed. They collected up the cups, Zoë filled each one, and they all sat down to a nice cup of tea.

Chapter 12 - Wigwam

Horus and Zoë were sitting together on the floor one afternoon at Zoë's house. Zoë was taking apart an old blender, and Horus was reading a book about Native Americans in the Old West. Horus had come to a story about the Apache, and he was thinking about tomahawks and war paint and wild ponies and bows and arrows.

Zoë had a soldering iron and was detaching the motor where it was connected to a plastic control panel full of buttons. The smoke from the solder rose into the air, and it gave Horus an idea.

"Native Americans didn't need much," he said. "Just a tent to keep out the rain and a fire to cook their food. No roof, no door, no carpets, no stove."

"Yeah," said Zoë. "No car, no garage, just ponies to ride, and bows and arrows to hunt down something to eat. Simple."

Author's Note #21 The Old Days

People often dream of days gone by, when things were more interesting. They seldom ask why the people from those times invented the things we have today.

“We could build a teepee.” said Horus. Zoë looked up from her blender. It was usually Zoë who came up with wild ideas. A teepee?

“Sounds like fun,” said Zoë, “but where will get deerskin, and poles, and sinew, and, you know, stuff like that?”

“We wouldn’t need to make everything ourselves,” said Horus. We could use tarps for the covering, and we can make the poles from trees that we’ll cut in the woods.”

“Hmmm.” said Zoë.

“Well,” said Horus, we can use a hatchet to trim the poles, and some rope to bind the top...”

“And old shoelaces to tip up the seams!” said Zoë. She was definitely warming to the idea.

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“And we could grind up some plants from the field behind your house and make war-paint!” Horus was really excited.

“What about bows and arrows?” asked Zoë. Her father had a shotgun, but that was definitely off limits.

“Bows and arrows?” asked Horus, startled.

“To hunt animals, for food,” said Zoë.

“Well,” said Horus, “we’ll just have to make some. That’s what they did in the old days.

“Let’s get started!” exclaimed Zoë. She put down her soldering iron and looked right at Horus. “I’ve can get a hatchet from the garage.”

“Me too,” said Horus. “I’ll meet you down at the edge of the woods in fifteen minutes.” Fifteen minutes later, they strode into the woods.

They found some young maple trees, and began to chop them down with their hatchets. It was hard work. After half an hour, of intermittent chopping, they

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managed to bring down a sapling whose trunk was about four inches thick and about 20 feet long. It hit the ground with a crack and a whoosh, as the young branches collapsed under the weight. In less than an hour, they had chopped off all the branches and were left with a long, thin pole.

“How many of these will we need?” said Zoë, catching her breath.

“Don’t know,” said Horus, “at least eight, maybe twelve.” It took them a couple of days to cut and trim twelve young trees, but at last they had a stack of poles, which they dragged back up to the house, one at a time.

“Where’d you get the trees?” asked Horus’ dad. He was home for a few weeks during the summer.

“Cut ‘em ourselves, in the woods,” said Horus.

“What for?” asked his dad.

“We’re building a teepee,” said Horus. His dad looked impressed, and nodded.

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“All right then,” said his dad. “Just don’t cut down the whole forest!”

They headed over to Zoë’s house together, to look for a covering. Zoë’s dad was out in the garage.

“Dad,” asked Zoë, “do we have any deerskin?” Her dad was accustomed to his daughter asking for odd things, but this was a new one.

“Deerskin?” asked her dad. “What for?”

“We need a covering for our teepee,” said Zoë, as though people in Wyeknot made teepees every day.

“Well, no,” said her dad, “but I suppose you could use the old tarps from the loft.”

“Thanks dad!” beamed Zoë.

“How you going to cut them up?” asked her dad.

“Cut them up?” asked Zoë.

“Well,” said her dad, “they’re not the right size or shape for a teepee.”

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“Oh, said Horus, “we’ll just use some of the big knives from the kitchen.

“I don’t think so!” exclaimed Zoë’s dad, a bit alarmed. “Here,” he said rummaging through his toolbox, “use this.” He handed Zoë a small utility knife, with a sliding angled blade. “But be careful. It’s very, very sharp.”

“Okay,” said Zoë. They rummaged through the old canvas tarps in the loft above the garage, and came up with five pieces that looked like they might to the job.

“I don’t think it’s enough,” said Horus.

“The teepee gets narrower toward the top,” explained Zoë. “It’ll do.” They dragged the tarps over to Horus’ backyard and sat down to draw up a plan for the teepee. Horus had several books on the topic, and brought out one that actually showed a diagram of a couple of semi-circular swaths that when wrapped around the poles would form a sort of cone-shaped tent. It even showed places for the door flap and the vent at the top to let out smoke.

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They got the largest markers they could find and copied their design from the paper on the clipboard to the pieces of canvas tarp, which they laid out flat in the sun. They looked over the lines they'd made, and measured them one more time with a tape measure.

“Ought to make a fine teepee,” said Horus.

“You reckon?” said Zoë.

“Let's cut,” said Horus.

“I'll cut them,” said Zoë. Horus held the tarps steady while Zoë went along the marked lines with the utility knife. None of the tarps were large enough to make a teepee by themselves.

“We'll have to sew the pieces together,” said Horus.

“I'll get a needle and some heavy thread.” Said Zoë. She disappeared through the gate. She found her mom in the kitchen, baking some bread.

“Mom,” said Zoë.

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“Yes dear,” said her Mom, tenderly.

“I need to borrow the strongest needles and heaviest thread you’ve got.”

“What for?” asked her Mom.

“Horus and I are making a teepee,” said Zoë.

“Oh, right,” said her Mom, and she brought Zoë some extra heavy needles and very thick black thread.

“Thanks mom!” said Zoë. She gave her mom a kiss and headed back to Horus’ house.

Zoë and Horus sat down together at the picnic table in the backyard and started to sew the pieces of tarp. Try as they might, they couldn’t get the needles through the heavy canvas. Horus tried gripping the needles with a pair of pliers. Shortly, all five needles had snapped in two and were useless.

“How’d they do it?” asked Horus, shaking his head.

“I have an idea,” said Zoë. She returned a few

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minutes later with her soldering iron and an extension cord.

“Good idea,” said Horus. He marked dots along the edges every few inches, while Zoë heated up the soldering iron. When they were ready, Horus held up the tarp and Zoë burned hold through each dot with her iron. It took quite a while to burn all of the holes, but at last they finished.

“What’ll we use to lace ‘em together?” asked Zoë.

“The Indians used sinew,” said Horus.

“Well,” said Zoë, “sinew is going to be pretty tough to find ‘round here.”

“I’ll think of something,” said Horus. It was getting dark, so they decided to call it a day and meet again tomorrow.

The next day, Zoë hurried through breakfast, then ran to Horus’ house. She was eager to find out if he’d solved the problem.

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“I’ve got it!” said Horus. He held up two fists full of shoelaces.

“Where’d you get ‘em?” ask Zoë, eyeing him critically.

“Never mind,” said Horus. They began lacing the pieces together, and by mid-morning they had a nice, broad, circular covering with a small circle in the middle. They laid out the poles in a radial pattern, with the thin ends overlapping slightly at the center and the thick ends spread out evenly around the circle. They tied the poles together at the center with a bit of rope, and laid the tarp over the poles. They were very excited.

“Time to put it up,” said Horus.

“How are we going to do that?” asked Zoë. “It’s really heavy, and we haven’t got a crane or a winch or anything.”

“Neither did they,” said Horus. “The Indians just got the tribe together and pushed toward the middle.”

“We’re a little short on Indians,” said Zoë. “How

about our parents?”

“Right,” said Horus. They both headed inside to ask. About ten minutes later, Zoë and her mom and dad and Horus and his mom and dad were standing in a circle. They all bent down, and gripped the base of the pole nearest them. “Ready?” asked Horus.

“Ready!” shouted the gang.

“Push!” said Horus, and they all began to push the ends of their poles toward the middle. The center gave a little leap, and then rose steadily, forming a tall, evenly rounded cone, with the tarp stretched tightly around it and the tips of the poles sticking through the hole at the top.

“Okay!” shouted Horus, and they all planted the base of their poles firmly on the ground with a satisfying “thump”.

They all stepped back. There before them stood a teepee!

“Wow!” said Horus.

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“Wow!” said Zoë.

“Can I sleep in the teepee tonight?” asked Horus.

“Okay,” said Mr. and Mrs. Heath.

“Me too?” asked Zoë.

“Sure,” said Mr. and Mrs. Heath.

Zoe and Horus pulled back the flap over the entrance, and stepped inside. It was kinda dark, and smelled like fresh grass and old, moldy canvas. But it was a teepee! And it was theirs.

They sat down on the ground. After a while Zoë looked at Horus. “What do we do now?” she asked.

“Let’s put on war paint!” said Horus.

“We’re not going to war!” said Zoë.

“It’s alright,” said Horus, “we can still wear war paint. And we need headdresses.”

“Headdresses?” Zoë looked confused.

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“Headbands, with feathers stuck in them,” said Horus.

“I have *lots* of feathers!” said Zoë cheerfully. “I picked them up in the woods.”

“Great!” said Horus. “We can use our mom’s makeup to paint our faces.”

So they got the sashes from a couple of old bathrobes and sewed feathers into them. They used eyebrow pencils, lipstick, and eyeshade to decorate their faces. Horus had three slanting red stripes on each cheek, and Zoë had blue shadows on her jawbones and a large black circle on her forehead. They tied the sashes around the top of their heads.

“You look pretty fierce!” said Horus.

“You too,” said Zoë.

Horus’ Mom came out and took a few pictures. She returned a few minutes later with some chicken sandwiches. Zoë reached for a sandwich.

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“We can’t eat that!” shouted Horus.

“Why not?” asked Zoë.

“We’re Indians!” said Horus. “We eat deer and rabbits!”

“Where are we going to get deer and rabbits?” asked Zoë.

“We have to go hunting,” said Horus.

“My dad won’t let us use guns!” said Zoë, alarmed.

“We’ll use bows and arrows,” said Horus.

“Where will we get bows and arrows?” asked Zoë.

“We’ll *make* them,” said Horus.

“That could take time,” suggested Zoë.

“All the more reason to get started right away,” said Horus.

Author's Note #22 Hunting and Gathering

Most pre-industrial societies were either farmers or hunter-and-gatherers. It's easier to say than it is to do.

Zoë and Horus went down to the woods and cut some springy yew branches. They sat all afternoon, shaving off the bark and trimming their bows. They even cut the straightest ash branches they could find, carefully rolling and trimming them into shafts for arrows. They collected fallen bird feathers, and Zoë's dad showed them how to split the quills and fletch the arrows. They didn't have arrowheads, so Horus improvised and used the points off a set of darts from his garage.

They strung the bows, notched the arrows, and tried them out. The bows were too springy, and the arrows flew less than twenty feet.

"We're not going to get any deer with these," said Horus.

"How about rabbits?" asked Zoë.

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“Nope,” said Horus. “This hunting thing is a lot harder than I thought.”

“I’m hungry!” said Zoë.

“Me too!” admitted Horus.

“There’s only one thing to do,” said Zoë. “Go to the teepee, Horus.”

“What about you?” asked Horus.

“I’ll meet you there in ten minutes,” said Zoë, and she ran off toward her house. Horus walked over to the teepee, stepped inside, and took a seat on the ground.

Zoe appeared ten minutes later, with a large basket under her arm. She sat down and opened the basket revealing a small tablecloth and a whole basket full of food.

“Chicken sandwich?” said Zoë. Horus smiled.

“Two, please!” he said.

Chapter 13 - Sing

Zoë and her friends were out in front of her house one fine Spring afternoon. Two girls were holding a bit of rope, and the other girls were taking turns jumping. As each girl jumped, the rest sang a little nonsense song, which went like this:

Miss Norney had a baby.

His name was Tiny Tim.

She put him in the bathtub,

To see if he could swim!

Horus was sitting in his backyard, doing nothing in particular. He heard the girls singing, and decided to go around to the front and see what they were up to.

“Hi Zoë!” said Horus brightly as he spied her, right at the top of her jump.

“Oh!” said Zoë, as she stepped forward out of the jump rope. “Hi, Horus!” she said, trotting over to the fence, still catching her breath.

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“Whatcha doin’?” asked Horus.

“Oh, just jumping rope with a few friends.” She and Horus turned and watched the girls. They were still singing:

He drank up all the water,

He ate up all the soap.

He would’ve swallowed the bathtub,

But it wouldn’t go down his throat!

“What’s that they’re singing?” asked Horus.

“Oh, just an old rhyme. Everybody knows it, and it helps them keep time with rope.”

“But, it doesn’t make much sense,” observed Horus.

“No, of course not” said Zoë. “That’s not the point.”

“But, it’s silly” said Horus.

“It’s fun!” said Zoë.

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“Does look like fun,” said Horus. “Do you think I could do it?”

“Sure!” said Zoë. “Easiest thing in the world, jumping rope. Would you like to try?”

Author's Note #23 Nonsense

Nonsense is a playful and relaxing relief from excessive seriousness. Try to engage in a little nonsense every day.

“I dunno,” said Horus warily.

“C'mon,” said Zoë. “It's easy!” She took his hand and led him around the gate to where the girls were jumping. They looked up briefly. “Girls, this is my friend, Horus.”

“HI HORUS,” they all said together, continuing to jump.

“Horus wants to try jumping rope,” said Zoë. The girls looked doubtful, but they stop the rope so Horus could approach. “You stand there,” said Zoë, pointing at a spot just outside the loop. The girls started

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swinging the rope again, slowly. “When the rope comes down in front of you, just jump into the middle of the circle,” explained Zoë. “And when it comes around, just jump up a bit and let it pass under your feet. Ready?”

Horus watched the rope pass over and under a couple of passes, trying to judge the speed and timing. He waited until it had just gone by, then jumped into the center. When the rope came around again, he waited until it was nearly at his feet, and then jumped mightily into the air. The rope passed swiftly beneath his feet. He’d made it!

Horus was very excited, so excited that while he was celebrating, he forgot to watch the rope. Soon, it came ‘round again. Caught by surprise, he leaped, but too late. The rope hooked his trailing leg, and he came crashing down on his head.

“Ow!” said Horus, getting to his feet.

“It takes a little practice,” said Zoë, “until you get the rhythm.”

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“Now you tell me,” said Horus, rubbing his head. “I think I’ll just sit here awhile and watch.” And he sat down on a large rock and watched the girls resume their game. Again, they were singing:

Miss Norney called the doctor.

The doctor called the nurse.

The nurse called the lady,

With the alligator purse!

Horus listened, and then it dawned on him. It wasn’t their rope jumping that interested him. It was their singing! He imagined himself, singing a joyful tune, surrounded by a crowd of admirers. He listened a little more:

In came the doctor.

In came the nurse.

In came lady,

With the alligator purse!

Horus stood up to go.

“Don’t you want to try again?” asked Zoë.

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“No, thanks,” said Horus. “Good-bye, ladies.”

“GOOD-BYE!” they said. Horus trotted on home and sat in his backyard. He was alone, and so he tried to sing the song he’d heard. His voice was very soft, and kind of squeaky. He tried again:

“Miss Norney had a baby...”

Try as he might he couldn’t get the rhythm or the tone. His notes were all over the place. He’d never really tried to sing before. His mom sang sometimes, and even his father had occasionally sung a simple song or two while working in the yard. Why couldn’t he? He decided to ask his mom, and headed into the house.

“Mom,” said Horus.

“Yes, dear,” said his mom. She always seemed ready to talk with him. He loved that about her.

“Can you teach me to sing?” asked Horus.

“Everyone can sing,” said his mom.

“Zoë and her friends can sing,” said Horus. “But I

can't."

"You just need practice," said his mom.

"But how do I start?" asked Horus.

"Mrs. Wilson sings in the choir," said his mom.

"Maybe she teach you a few things."

"Zoë's mom?" thought Horus. He'd never considered asking Zoë's mom for anything before. He felt a little embarrassed. His mom saw his hesitation.

"She's always singing something or other," said his mom. "I think she'd be pleased to teach you, if you asked her."

Author's Note #24 Singing

Singing, like dancing, should be done for the sheer pleasure of it. Don't worry about how you sound, or what others think of it. It's not them you are singing for.

Horus made up his mind. He really wanted to learn how to sing. So, next morning, he found himself on the front steps of Zoë's house, knocking on the door.

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“Oh, hello Horus,” said Mrs. Wilson. “Zoë’s still sleeping. She should be getting up pretty soon. Why not come back in an hour.”

“Actually,” said Horus, summoning his courage, “I’d like to talk to you, if you have a minute.”

“Sure,” said Mrs. Wilson. “C’mon in.” They both sat down in at the kitchen table. “What’s up?”

“I’d like to learn to sing!” exclaimed Horus.

“Everyone can sing,” began Mrs. Wilson.

“And I’d like you to teach me.” Said Horus.

“What could I teach you?” asked Mrs. Wilson.

“I don’t know,” said Horus. “When I sing, it sounds all squeaky and out of tune. And I don’t get rhythm at all!”

“Well, of course I’ll teach you,” said Mrs. Wilson kindly. “It’s the easiest thing in the world.”

“When can we start?” asked Horus.

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“Well,” said Mrs. Wilson, “let me hear you sing.”

Miss Norney had a baby...

“I see,” said Mrs. Wilson. “This might take a while.”

They both laughed.

“Begin by counting,” said Mrs. Wilson. “One, two, three, four, one, two, three, four...” Horus began to count. “Nice and even”, said Mrs. Wilson. “Tap your foot as you go.”

“One, two, three, four...” said Horus. He felt better already.

“Come back tomorrow, and we’ll work on your breathing,” said Mrs. Wilson. “Remember to practice.”

“Thanks!” said Horus. “And, Mrs. Wilson...”

“Yes?” asked Mrs. Wilson.

“Please don’t tell ANYONE that you’re teaching me!”

“I understand,” said Mrs. Wilson.

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Horus returned the following afternoon.

“Ok, Horus, sing for me,” said Mrs. Wilson.

Miss Norney had a baby...

“Hmmm,” said Mrs. Wilson. “You are holding your breath high in your chest. Breathe deeply, all the way from your abdomen.

“What’s an abdomen?” asked Horus.

“Just start below your belly-button, and work your way up. Fill your lungs with air.”

Horus took a deep breath. His shoulders lifted, and his belly rose.

“Now, sing!” said Mrs. Wilson.

Miss Norney had a baby...

“Think about the notes you are about to sing. Hear the song in your mind,” said Mrs. Wilson. “Keep practicing. See you tomorrow.”

All afternoon, Horus practiced breathing and

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singing, singing and breathing. He wasn't sure, but he thought he was making progress. He practiced most of the evening, and then settled in for a good night's sleep.

The next afternoon, Horus returned to Mrs. Wilson.

"Show us what you've learned," she said. Horus showed her his breathing.

"Very good," said Mrs. Wilson. "Now, sing!"

Miss Norney had a baby...

"Wait a minute," said Mrs. Wilson. "Where'd you get that song?"

"I heard the girls singing it while they jumped rope," said Horus.

"What do you feel when you sing that song?" asked Mrs. Wilson.

"Nothing," said Horus.

"That will never do," said Mrs. Wilson. "To sing

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well, we must find a song that you can feel something for, right down deep in your bones. How about this one?" She began to sing:

Love, it's been a dozen seasons

Must I wait a dozen more?

And I've yet to know the reasons

Keeping you from my door.

"Lovely!" said Horus. "It's much better than 'Miss Norney's Baby'"

"Thank-you," said Mrs. Wilson. "I'll teach it to you." She and Horus went over the lyrics several times. He was surprised to find that he learned the tune very quickly.

"Much better," said Mrs. Wilson. "See you tomorrow." She gave Horus a written copy of the song, so he could practice on his own.

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Within a couple of weeks, Horus had mastered the song, and his voice was strong and his breathing was steady. But he took great care to only sing when no one (except for Mrs. Wilson) was around. He just didn't feel ready to share that part of himself with his friends.

Then, at school, a poster went up:

Wyeknot Elementary

TALENT SHOW

Sign up today and be part of the fun!

"I wonder," thought Horus. "Why shouldn't I? I've been practicing for weeks." He thought about it all afternoon. "I'll do it!" he decided, and wrote his name on the list just before leaving for the day. By the time he got home, doubts began to creep in. "Now I've done it," he thought. "How am I going to face all those people? What will they think of me?"

The next three weeks went a lot faster than Horus expected. He practiced and practiced, and Mrs. Wilson encouraged him and give him comments on how to

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improve his technique. But, would it be enough?

At last, the evening of the talent show arrived. Horus sat quietly, his chair in the front row with the other performers, waiting to take the stage. Suddenly, he heard a voice, from far off it seemed...”

“Horus Bluestone Heath,” it announced. “Singing, ‘The Road Will Bring You Home’”. Horus climbed the steps, and walked to the center of the stage, where a spotlight shone on a single microphone. It was very quiet. He stepped forward, into the light, and began to sing...”

Love, it's been a dozen seasons,
Must I wait a dozen more?
And I've yet to know the reasons,
Keeping you from my door.

Well the road took you a roamin',
And the road took you away.
But the road will bring you home and
It's with me you will stay.

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Now with ev'ry red sun's risin',
And the falling of the tide,
My eyes look to the horizon,
Wanting you by my side.

Well the road took you a roamin',
And the road took you away.
But the road will bring you home and,
It's with me you will stay.

He stood there, waiting for a moment for the world to fall apart. Then, the room began to erupt with applause. They were all clapping, clapping for *him!* He really *could* sing!

Chapter 14 - The Loss

Zoë and Horus lost a classmate the other day.

They weren't there when it happened. Claire stayed a little late at school, to finish an art project, a bit of pottery for Mrs. Fleur's art class. Mrs. Fleur said that Claire showed promise as an artist. Claire finished, hopped on her bicycle, and headed home. That was the last time they saw her.

"Hi Horus!" said Claire.

"Hi Claire!" said Horus. "What's up?"

"Nothing much," said Claire. "Got a new pot nearly done. Just got to add a little glaze and she's ready for the kiln."

"I'm no good at art," said Horus.

"Sure you are," said Claire. "Mrs. Fleur said everyone's got a bit of artist in their soul. You just gotta let it out!"

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“I think I’ll stick to literature,” said Horus. “See you at lunch.”

Horus turned the corner and headed down the hallway. Claire was like that, always eager to encourage others.

At lunch that day, everyone was in a particularly shiny mood. It was nearly Easter, and they would get a couple of days off for Spring Break. Spirits were high, and the conversation in the room was so loud one could barely think. Even the teachers seemed a bit distracted, what with blossoms jumping out on all the trees, and fruity perfume in the fresh, clean air. Birds were singing, and the sun was making its way north again, bringing green grass and flowers everywhere.

“Hí Zoë!” said Clair, at afternoon recess.

“Hí Claire!” said Zoë.

“Wanna jump rope?” asked Claire.

“Sure thing,” said Zoë. She and Clair walked hand in hand to a large paved area where a pair of fourth

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grade girls already had a long rope going. Claire and Zoë jumped in together, laughing, enjoying the freedom of being outside, healthy and happy.

“What fun!” said Claire, out of breath. The two sat down on a bench to rest.

“That was great!” said Zoë. “What are you planning to do for Easter?”

“My family and I are taking a trip to London!” said Claire, excitedly. “We’re going to Buckingham Palace, and the Tower Bridge, and everything. There’s going to be a big parade on the Mall Easter Sunday.”

“Wow!” said Zoë. “I’ve never been to London.”

“Dad goes there a lot on business,” said Claire. “But this is the first time he’s taking the whole family along.”

“Sounds brilliant!” said Zoë. “Hope you have a wonderful time.” Zoë headed back inside. Claire was like that, always eager to try new experiences.

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Author's Note #25 Accidents

Accidents happen. There's no one to blame.

"Another cup, Tom?" asked Laura the waitress at the OK Diner. Tom Murphy looked up from his empty coffee cup.

"Sure, why not?" said Tom. He looked down again at the surface of the table. Tom ran deliveries in a small lorry all over town. It was a long day's work, but come three o'clock you could find him at the diner. It had been that way for a long, long time.

"Why so down in the mouth?" asked Laura with a gentle smile. "Somethin' on yer mind?"

"Don't you know what day it is?" asked Tom.

"I'm sorry," said Laura quickly. "Didn't realize. How many years it's been, now?"

"Three years, to the day," said Tom.

"Poor Fiona," said Laura.

"It happened so quickly," said Tom, nodding

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slowly. "One day a fine strong lass, and the next in her sickbed. Two weeks later, she was gone."

"Tom, you and your wife are still young. You can have another child."

"No, not for us," said Tom. He raised his cup and drained it. "G'bye, Laura," said Tom, and he rose and turned for the door.

"Where's Henry?" asked Lily. She was watching the Hoover twins for the day. The two boys had been out in the backyard, playing with the family dog, a feisty Cairn Terrier named Henry.

"I dunno," said John.

"Out in back," said Jim.

"I don't see him," said Lily. She stepped out in back and called. "Henry! Henry!" No sign of Henry. She circled around to the side gate, half open, banging lightly in the wind.

"Boys!" shouted Lily angrily. "I've told you not to

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open that gate. Now Henry's loose, and we've got to go looking for him."

"Sorry," they said, and looked down at the floor. She hurriedly put on their jackets, and headed for the front door.

"Well, come on!" said Lily rather sternly. She shut the door behind them, and the three headed down the street calling for Henry.

Author's Note #26 Cause and Effect

No one thing causes another. Everything that happens, happens in a rich context of effort and chance.

That day, Claire decided to take the old west road, for a change. She braced her feet against the pedals. The breeze was blowing the scent of apple blossoms, and the sun hung low in the late afternoon sky ahead. She breathed in the fresh air. She felt the warmth of the sun on her face. She thought about London, and her mother and father, and the exciting times ahead.

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That day, Tom decided to take the old west road, to complete the delivery of several bottles of milk to the orphanage on the edge of town. The trees cast shadows that played on his windshield. The lorry bounced along the rough road. He hung his arm out the window and smoked a cigarette. He thought about his deliveries, and the supper that would be waiting for him at the end of the day.

That day, Henry, enjoying his newfound freedom, trotted down the narrow road, stopping now and again to sniff the ground or water an occasional tree or bush. He heard the other dogs bark behind their closed gates and high fences, and thought how wonderful it was to be a dog and to be free.

“Henry!” called Lily and the boys. “Henry!” Henry disappeared around the corner.

Claire was riding along the shoulder of the road when the lorry came up alongside her. Henry rounded the corner, and when he spotted the lorry, began to bark loudly. Tom looked at the dog, just before it ran

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into the street. Quickly, Tom braked the lorry and swerved to the left. It happened so fast. His side-view mirror clipped the handlebars on Claire's bicycle. She veered sharply, screamed just once, and fell beneath the rear wheels. Tom stopped, and jumped from the truck, too late. There was Claire, lying in the road, Henry sniffing helplessly by her side.

They rushed her to the hospital, but there was nothing to be done. She died on the way there. Her mother and father came down later to be with their daughter. There would be no trip to London.

"I miss Claire," said Zoë, sitting on the porch with Horus the following day.

"I miss her, too," said Horus.

Chapter 15 - Missing

Zoë had a cat, named Marble. She was a calico cat, with white and black and orange splotches scattered all over her furry body. She had quick, yellow eyes, and whiskers that tickled when you rubbed noses with her. She had lived at the Wilson house for seven years, and was part of the family.

Zoë called her cat Marble 'cause when she was just a kitten, Zoë liked to roll a marble across the hardwood floor, right in front of her. The cat would stare at the marble intently, crouch down until she was motionless, and then pounce, only to send the marble skittering away, with Marble in hot pursuit.

Zoë was very fond of her cat, and Marble often slept in bed with her, climbing up on her legs or tummy, and then purring loudly. Sometimes Marble even came up close to her face, her breath brushing Zoë's cheek, and then lick Zoë's nose or chin with that sandpaper tongue.

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Author's Note #27 Worry

When something goes wrong, it seems like we can't help worrying. But it doesn't change a thing.

"Where's Marble?" said Zoë to her mom one morning.

"What do you mean?" asked her mom.

"I've been looking all over the place," said Zoë, "for almost an hour. I can't find her anywhere."

"I'm sure she's around," said her mom. "She's probably out chasing grasshoppers in the field." True, Marble loved to hide in the tall grass and then pounce and leap as the grasshoppers took off in flight. But, try as she might, Zoë didn't find Marble anywhere.

"Well, maybe she'll turn up tonight at bedtime," thought Zoë. But as Zoë put on her pajamas, and tucked herself into bed, there was still no sign of Marble.

That night, Zoë had a dream. She was standing by

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the road in front of her house, looking for Marble.

“Marble, Marble, where are you?” she called. Then she saw a blurred image appear in the field across the road from her. The image grew sharper as it came nearer. It was Marble.

“Oh, Marble, Marble!” called Zoë, “where have you been?”

A truck came down the road. Marble began to cross.

“No! Marble, no! Go back!” The truck was almost upon her.

“Go back! Marble! Go back!”

“What’s wrong, Zoë?” said Zoë’s mom. She sat down on the bed and put her arms around Zoë.

“Mom, Marble’s going to be hit by a truck!”

“It was a dream, Zoë. Just a dream,” said her mom.

“Oh mom,” cried Zoë. “Where is Marble?”

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“I don’t know,” said her mom. “We’ll look for her tomorrow. Good night, Zoë. Try and get some sleep.”

The next morning, Zoë came down to breakfast.

“Why the long face?” said her mom.

“Where’s Marble,” said Zoë.

“Oh, Zoë,” said her mom, sitting down beside her, “don’t worry. She’ll turn up.”

Zoë checked Marble’s bowl. Still full. She went from room to room, calling “Marble, Marble, here kitty-kitty”. Where was that cat?

She went outside and walked around in the open field behind the house. She looked out front by the road. She even went next door to Horus’ house, and stood in the backyard looking up at the Great Oak Tree. Then she saw a pair of eyes, peering from the shadows under the rose bushes.

Zoë walked slowly toward the bushes. The eyes were staring at her. “Marble?” she said, stooping low to

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get a better look. Suddenly the eyes sprung right at her. She gasped, and stumbled as whatever it was darted past her. She looked up from the ground. It was a large, dark grey tomcat. He was sleek and strong and as still as a statue. He crouched right in front of her, gazing fixedly into her eyes. The he suddenly turned and disappeared through a hole in the fence. Zoë sat there in the grass for a minute, then got to her feet and stared back into the limbs of the Great Oak Tree.

“Marble, Marble,” cried Zoë.

“Whatcha doin’?” said a familiar voice.

“Oh! Hi Horus. I’m searching for my cat.”

“Well, let’s take a look,” said Horus. He was always willing to help. Zoë loved him for it. They both started climbing.

“Marble, Marble,” called Zoë.

“Here kitty-kitty,” said Horus. But after about ten minutes, they decided that Marble wasn’t up in the tree.

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“She’ll turn up,” said Horus.

Author's Note #28 Despair

Things may not work out in the end, but there's never a good reason to give up early.

Zoë knew that neither her mother nor her best friend knew what would happen. Nor could they help her find Marble. She would have to wait and see. By the next day, she was frantic.

“Where is she?” thought Zoë. Her mom saw the worry on her face.

“Hey,” said her mom. “It’ll be okay. Is there anywhere you haven’t looked yet?”

“No,” said Zoë. “I mean, I’ve looked in every room in the house, even the closets and cupboards.”

“How about outside?” asked her mom.

“I looked out front by the road. I looked out back in the field. I looked in the Great Oak Tree. I looked in the woodshed. I looked in the ga...” Zoë stopped and

looked at her mom.

“I *haven't* looked in the garage!” said Zoë. She was on her way in a flash. She pried open the old wooden side door and entered the garage. It was dusty, and dirty, and dark, and smelled old inside. She walked about, looking over and under things.

“Marble, Marble, here kitty-kitty,” said Zoë hopefully. Then, she heard something.

“Meow,” it said.

“Marble! Is that you?” asked Zoë.

“Meow,” it said.

“Marble! Where are you?” asked Zoë.

“Meeeoowww,” it said. Zoë looked above the top shelf. Way back, in the corner, she saw a pair of yellow eyes.

“Marble!” shouted Zoë. “What are you doing up there?” She climbed up the old ladder, and peeked over the top shelf. Marble was curled up on an old rug, with

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four little kittens tucked under her. Two of them were calico, and two of them were dark gray!

“Kittens!” exclaimed Zoë. “I should’ve guessed!” Zoë ran back to the house and told her mom. The two of them came back and carefully helped Marble and her kittens into a clean basket with a soft pillow. Now she’d have to come up with some names!

Chapter 16 - Unknown

Zoë sat with her dad on the porch on Sunday afternoon. He'd just finished telling her a great story about a famous writer of the 19th century. She loved the story, and rested her head on her dad's shoulder, just happy to be there. She looked up, and thought she saw something in her father's face. Not sadness, exactly, but something like it.

"What's wrong, Dad?" asked Zoë.

"Oh, nothing," said her dad. He looked out at the field of grass, swaying gently in the late-afternoon sun.

"Didn't you like the story?" asked Zoë.

"Sure I did," said her dad. He tried to smile, but didn't quite make it.

"Are you unhappy with me?" asked Zoë.

"Oh no, Zoë," said her dad, looking right into her eyes. "I love you, Zoë." That made her feel quite a bit

better.

“Okay,” she said. They sat there, just the two of them, for a while. Then her dad, got up and went inside.

The next morning Zoë, her mom, and her dad, sat at the breakfast table, eating bowls of oatmeal porridge, Zoë’s favorite.

“I was thinking,” said Zoë’s mom, “maybe we should walk up to Hallard’s Hill today. I’ll pack some chicken, and some pie, and we’ll make a picnic at the top. What do you two think?”

“Sounds great!” said Zoë.

“Wonderful idea,” said Zoë’s dad, “why don’t you two go on. I’ve got some work to finish.”

“Oh, dad,” said Zoë. “Come with us!”

“No, I don’t think so,” said her dad. “I really need to clean the garage.”

“Okay,” said Zoë’s mom, “but we’ll miss you.”

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Author's Note #29 Happiness

Happiness isn't about what you have. It's about how you feel.

So, Zoë and her mom had a picnic, and her dad cleaned the garage. That evening, Zoë noticed her dad, staring out the window at dinner.

“What’s up Dad?” said Zoë.

“Oh, nothing,” said her dad. “Just thinking.”

“Whatcha thinking about?” asked Zoë. Her mom looked up at her, and then at her father.

“Things,” said Zoë’s dad. “You know, this and that.” Zoë’s mom looked down at the table. Nobody said anything.

After dinner, Zoë went looking for her dad. She found him, sitting out on the front porch.

“Dad,” said Zoë.

“Yes, Zoë,” said her dad.

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“What’s wrong, Dad?” said Zoë.

“I’m unhappy, Zoë,” said her dad.

“How come?” said Zoë.

“Well,” said her dad, “I’ve been a teacher for twenty years.”

“Yeah, I know,” said Zoë. “And you’re a really good teacher.”

“Well, I guess I thought I’d be doing something *important* with my life,” said her dad. “Maybe change the world, in some way.”

“But, you *are* changing the world,” said Zoë, “everyday, right here in Wyeknot.”

“I’m practically unknown,” said her dad. “Nobody outside Wyeknot even knows I exist. No one will notice when I’m gone.”

“Mom and I will notice,” said Zoë. “Mom and I think about you everyday.”

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“Nobody knows me,” said her dad.

“We do,” said Zoë.

“Nobody cares about who I am, what I’ve done...”
said her dad.

“Mom and I LOVE YOU!!!” said Zoë. She threw
her arms around her dad’s neck. “A LOT!!!”

Her dad smiled. It was a sad, quiet smile.

Next morning, after breakfast, Zoë sat with her
mom and helped her fold the clean clothes.

“Mom,” said Zoë.

“Yes, Zoë” said her mom.

“Dad is unhappy,” said Zoë.

“I know,” said her mom. “Most men reach a point in
their lives when they wonder if that’s all there is. Your
father thinks that what he does isn’t important. Maybe
he should have done something more exciting, more
impressive with his life.”

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“That’s it!” said Zoë.

“What?” said her Mom.

“We’re going to make him famous,” said Zoë.

“How?” asked her mom.

“We’re going to invite all the teachers, and all the kids, and all their parents, and throw a surprise party for Dad,” said Zoë.

“What a wonderful idea!” said her mom.

So, Zoë and her mom went down to the school and explained her idea to the principal. He agreed to arrange for all of the teachers to take a couple of hours off for the celebration. She got the list of parents for Mr. Wilson’s class, plus some lists of old students from years gone by. Everyone would meet the following Tuesday.

That Saturday, Zoë went to work. She and her mom went to town, with a list of names and addresses. When she got to the first house on the list, she

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wondered if she could really do this. She walked up the front steps and knocked on the door. A man in his twenties opened the door.

“Yes?” he said looking down at Zoë.

“Samuel Collins?” asked Zoë.

“That’s right,” said Sam. “And who might you be?”

“I’m Zoë,” said Zoë, “Zoë Wilson.”

“Oh, you’re Matthew Wilson’s daughter, aren’t you?” he said.

“Yes, that’s right,” said Zoë. “Didn’t you have my dad as a teacher when you were in school?”

“Sure did,” said Sam. “Taught me everything I know about math. Why?”

“Well,” said Zoë, “we’re having a little party for my father at the school, next Tuesday afternoon. To recognize his contribution to the community. Could you come?”

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“I’ll be there,” said Sam.

And so it went. Zoë visited parents, students, and former students, all day until her feet hurt. She’d gotten at least twenty to agree to come. She wondered about how well her mom had done.

Her mom met her at the OK Diner late that afternoon, and they traded stories over tea and small dishes of ice cream.

“Well,” said her mom, “I must say I didn’t realize how popular your father is in Wyeknot. I must have about twenty people showing up, what with students and their parents and...”

“I’ve got twenty as well!” said Zoë, enthusiastically. “Oh mom, it’s going to be great.”

On Tuesday, Mr. Wilson’s class seemed to bubble over with excitement.

“What’s going on?” thought Mr. Wilson.

Then, around 2pm, Mr. Wilson got a message from

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the office. It said he was required for an emergency meeting, and should report to the principal's office immediately. Mr. Wilson ask Miss Quimby to look after his class, and reported to Mr. Simmons' office as requested. But when he got there, it was just Mr. Simmons and himself.

"What's up?" asked Mr. Wilson.

"Oh, I decided we should all meet in the gym" said the principal. They proceeded to the gym, but as the doors opened, there was a loud chorus of voices.

"SURPRISE!" everyone called.

All of Mr. Wilson's students, and all their parents, and all the other teachers were there, sitting in folding chairs. Mr. Wilson was escorted to an empty chair, right in front. Mr. Simmons stepped to the microphone, on the small stage.

"We'd like to celebrate a most excellent teacher," he began. "Mr. Wilson has taught us all how to do math and science. But, he has also taught us how to be

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honest, helpful, courteous, and kind. A young man stepped up to the microphone.

“Mr. Wilson taught me everything I needed to know about mathematics,” he said. “But more than that, he taught me how to be a good person. I understand now how important it is to treat others well, and I’ll never forget.” The young man smiled at Mr. Wilson. Then another man stepped up.

“I got into a bit of trouble when I was here at school,” he began. “But Mr. Wilson talked some sense into me, and showed me how to get along. Who knows where I’d be today without his help.” Everyone smiled, and a young girl stepped up. She seemed a bit overwhelmed by the crowd but then blinked her eyes and began to speak.

“I was failing at math last year,” she said. “I thought I was just stupid. With a little coaching from Mr. Wilson, I got the hang of it. This year has been a breeze. Mr. Wilson taught me to believe in myself. Now I can do anything I put my mind to, if I’m willing to work at it.

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Thanks.” She stepped down, and gave Mr. Wilson a hug. Everyone applauded and cheered.

Mr. Wilson stepped up and faced the crowd. There were old students, new students, parents and teachers. And he knew every one of them. “Thank you,” he said. “Thank you all!”

And he smiled.

Chapter 17 - Sitting

It didn't happen very often, but Zoë's mom and dad were going out for the evening. They had arranged for Angela, a teenage girl from the local high school, to babysit.

"I don't need a sitter", said Zoë.

"You're nine years old," said her mother.

"Exactly," said Zoë, "I can look after myself."

"Well," said her mother, "you are most certainly independent, and wise beyond your years." She kissed her daughter. "Angela will be around, just in case you need her."

Author's Note #30 Adults

No matter how much you know, adults still want to look out for you. It's their job.

So, about five in the evening, Angela showed up. Zoë's mom gave the sitter a few last instructions, and

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then she and her husband were off. Angela smiled at Zoë, and then went to the living room and spread out her school homework. Zoë sat down on the living room floor and began to take apart a small motor her father had brought her from an old washing machine.

“Watcha doin’?” asked Angela.

“Taking apart an old motor,” said Zoë.

“Why don’t you go and get something to put under it, so you don’t stain the rug,” said Angela.

Zoë was annoyed. That was just the sort of thing her mom would say. Still, Angela was right. Zoë went out to the garage, and came back with an old piece of canvas tarp. She spread the tarp out, placed the motor in the middle of it, and resumed taking it apart. She’d gotten through the outer casing, and was admiring the bright copper windings on the armature, when the doorbell rang.

Zoë sprang to the door, Angela close behind her. She threw open the door. It was Horus! “Hiya Zoë!” said

Horus.

“Hot dog!” said Zoë. “C’mon in!”

Horus looked at Angela, and she waved him inside. He followed Zoë into the living room, and sat down beside her.

“Taking apart a motor, eh?” said Horus.

“Yep,” said Zoë.

“Isn’t that a piece of the teepee we made?” asked Horus.

“Yep,” said Zoë. Horus leaned over and examined the interior of the motor as Zoë spread more parts out on the tarp.

“Is that from a motorcycle?” asked Angela, pointing at the motor on the floor. She couldn’t resist being curious.

“Washing machine,” said Zoë.

“Rocket,” said Horus.

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“Flying saucer!” said Angela.

“What?” said Zoë.

“Flying saucer,” said Angela, matter-of-factly,
“and we’re aliens.”

“From another country?” asked Horus.

“From another planet,” said Angela, “far from
here.”

Horus and Zoë looked at each other, wide-eyed. They had no idea that Angela had an imagination. She was practically a grown-up person, and spoke mostly about boys and parties and dating. Here she was talking about flying saucers from outer space!

Author's Note #31 Expectations

Just when think you know someone they may surprise you. All of us are unique, but we are more the same than we are different.

Angela saw them both staring at her. She didn’t say anything more, but simply waited. Then she laughed and said “Let’s be aliens!”

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“OK!” they both shouted.

Angela went to the kitchen and filled a mixing bowl with sifted flour. Everyone stuck their hands in the flour and then patted their faces until their hands and faces were mostly white. She then had Horus and Zoë sit still while she colored their upper and lower eyelids with blue eye shadow from her makeup kit, then sat in a kitchen chair so they could do hers.

“What about antennae?” said Zoë.

“Right you are,” said Angela. She went to the kitchen drawer and pulled out a roll of aluminum foil. She laid out three broad sheets of foil on the kitchen table, and all three of them set to work. Each of them made a close-fitting cap the size of their head, with wires from the disassembled motor attached on top for antennae.

“What about ray-guns?” said Horus.

Angela was not keen on guns, but she didn’t want to be difficult, so she went to the garage and got three

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small flashlights. Once they'd been wrapped in aluminum foil, they could be switched on or off for a ray-gun effect. The sofa became their flying saucer, and an old computer keyboard and toy steering wheel became their controls. They had just reached Saturn when there was a sound at the front door.

Mr. and Mrs. Wilson were returning home. As they entered the living room, Mrs. Wilson shrieked.

"Egad!" cried Mrs. Wilson. "We're being invaded by aliens from outer space!"

"I'll save you!" cried Mr. Wilson. He stepped toward the couch menacingly.

The aliens flashed their ray guns at him, and he fell down, gasping for air before he died.

Angela removed her helmet as Mrs. Wilson handed her a five-pound note. Mr. Wilson played dead, then grabbed both kids when they came closer for an impromptu wrestling match.

"What have you done with the children?"

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demanded Mr. Wilson.

“Kidnapped!” exclaimed the aliens.

“Bring them back, at once!” said Mr. Wilson.

Angela, Zoë, and Horus disappeared into the bathroom, where Angela removed their caps and washed their faces, first with cold cream and then a little soap and water. They emerged from the bathroom, and Angela and Horus headed for the front door.

“Good-night Mr. and Mrs. Wilson” said Angela.

“Good-night Zoë,” said Horus.

Peace settled over the living room, and the whole household was soon tucked into bed and fast asleep.

Chapter 18 - Fairy Farewell

Horus and Zoë were sitting around one afternoon. Horus noticed that Zoë hadn't said anything for quite some time.

"Hey Zoë," said Horus. "What's up with you?" Zoë was gazing out the window toward the woods behind the house. She turned her gaze back to Horus.

"Remember the time we went looking for leprechauns?" asked Zoë.

"Sure," said Horus.

"In the woods, along the creek?" asked Zoë.

"Yes," said Horus.

"Well," said Zoë, "you remember *you* put your head *deep* into a hole beneath a big, black, gnarly tree, and you got stuck."

"I remember!" said Horus.

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“You found something that day,” said Zoë.

“A silver spoon,” said Horus.

“A silver spoon,” repeated Zoë. “Have you still got it?”

“Yeah, so?” said Horus.

“WHERE IS IT?” said Zoë, so loudly that Horus nearly fell over backward.

“I dunno,” said Horus, “In my room somewhere.”

“Did you ever stop to think how a spoon found its way down in a hole at the bottom of a tree?” asked Zoë.

“No,” said Horus.

“Well, I did,” said Zoë. “Somebody put that spoon there, for safe keeping.”

“Who?” asked Horus. It was a sensible question.

“WHO?” shouted Zoë. “Horus, you are really dense!”

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“Who?” asked Horus. He was accustomed to Zoë’s occasional outbursts. She didn’t mean anything by it.

“FAIRIES!” said Zoë.

“There’s no such thing as fairies.” Said Horus calmly.

Author's Note #32 Fairies

Few believe in fairies nowadays. TV and movie writers often depict them as benign, lovely, floating sprites. They should know better.

“Well, who else would put a silver spoon down a hole in the ground?”

“Leprechauns?” suggested Horus.

“Get real,” said Zoë. Horus blinked at her a couple of times. She was serious.

“Maybe some kid put it there,” offered Horus.

“What kid do you know who would stick their

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head down a hole in a tree?” said Zoë.

Horus stared at her.

“I mean,” said Zoë quickly, “someone other than you and me.”

“Nobody,” said Horus.

“Exactly,” said Zoë. “Fairies like shiny things. Fairies live in the woods. And fairies aren’t afraid of anything!” Horus looked at the ground.

“So?” said Horus.

“So,” said Zoë, “remember those tiny flickering lights we saw near your bedroom window last night just as it was getting dark?”

“Fireflies,” said Horus.

“I’m not so sure,” said Zoë.

“Sparks from the chimney,” said Horus.

“Fairies,” said Zoë, “and I think they were looking

for something.”

“A silver spoon,” said Horus.

“Bingo!” said Zoë.

“So what?” said Horus. “Who cares about a bunch of fairies anyway? Let them get another spoon.”

“Fairies,” said Zoë, “are not the sweet, friendly, humming-bird type you see in the movies. Fairies have a mean streak, and could be downright dangerous if treated badly.”

Author's Note #33 The Right Thing

It can be too late to go out and play, and it can be too late to go to the movies, but it's never too late to do the right thing.

“Fine,” said Horus. “What do you suggest?”

“Put the spoon back,” said Zoë.

“Bother!” said Horus.

“Today,” said Zoë.

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“OK, later,” said Horus.

“Right now!” said Zoë. As I’ve mentioned elsewhere, Zoë could be rather stubborn once she’d made up her mind. Horus knew this, but really wasn’t in the mood for another trip to the woods. Still, if it would make Zoë happy...

“Alright,” said Horus. “Let’s go get the spoon.”

Horus and Zoë went upstairs to Horus’ room and began opening drawers and digging through the piles of stuff on the floor.

“We’ll never find it,” said Horus.

“Here it is,” said Zoë, shoving aside a bowl with a startled goldfish in it. “Let’s go!”

They headed down the old dirt road that ran from the back fence to the creek, stepped into the woods, and began looking for the oak tree. The sun had nearly gone in for the day, and they still hadn’t found it. Everything looked different in the fading twilight. They suddenly realized they were lost.

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“Where is that tree?” said Zoë. They both sat down on a log, unsure of what to do next. Then, quite unexpectedly, some tiny lights flickered near a pile of rocks.

“Look there,” said Horus.

“I see it,” said Zoë. “Let’s go.”

They jumped up and headed toward the pile of rocks. The lights were gone. Then they saw some more lights near an old, burned stump. By the time they reached the stump, the lights had disappeared again. But no sooner than when they had reached the stump, they saw some lights near the bottom of a large, gnarly oak tree. They followed the lights, only to lose them again as they approached the tree.

“Now what?” said Horus.

“Look,” said Zoë.

Several small lights could be seen coming from a hole at the bottom of the tree.

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“THERE!” shouted Zoë. Sure enough, it was the very same hole that Horus had gotten stuck in long ago.

“What do I do?” asked Horus. They both kneeled next to the hole.

“Toss it in,” said Zoë. “Hurry Horus!” Horus reached into his pocket and brought out the silver spoon. He took one last look in the failing light, and tossed it into the hole.

“O-K,” said Horus slowly. “But it’s dark now. How will we find our way back?”

As they peered into the darkness, they were astonished to see a single flickering light. As they walked toward it, they saw another, and another, and another. It was slow going, but within minutes they emerged from the dark woods onto a moonlit dirt road, and a few minutes later they reached Zoë’s back door.

“Thanks,” said Zoe.

“See ya tomorrow,” said Horus, and he turned for home.

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THE END