

The Handyman's Gift

By Benowa Creative
Club Juniors





Write a Book
in a Day



PARAMETERS FORM 2019

TEAM DETAILS

STATE: QLD
DIVISION: Middle School
SCHOOL/GROUP: Benowa State High School (GOLD COAST MC)
TEAM NAME: Benowa Creative Club Juniors
TEAM ID: 545

PARAMETERS AND RANDOM WORDS

Parameters

Primary character 1 Handyman
Primary character 2 Guitarist
Non-human character Giraffe
Setting Swimming pool
Issue My last dollar

Random words

Community
Skipped
Magic
Canvas
Sings

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Published by Benowa Creative Club Juniors, Benowa State High School, Mediterranean Drive, Benowa, QLD.

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THANK YOU

To the reader

You are about to embark on a magical adventure of talking animals and enchanted coins. But before you do, we thank you. Why, you ask? It is because of you that this book was written by a team of big imaginations and avid readers, just like you. This book is dedicated to you – stay amazing and keep fighting. We appreciate you.

To our supporters

The Rotary Club of Broadbeach has continued to support our entry for the second consecutive year, but our group's inaugural year. Thank you for prioritising writing, illustrating and reading opportunities for the next generation.

Thank you also to all those who gave donations and made this book possible.



CONTENTS PAGE

CHAPTER 1	Let Go
CHAPTER 2	A Mysterious Donor
CHAPTER 3	Pursuit of Happiness
CHAPTER 4	A Matter of Pride
CHAPTER 5	Last Hope
CHAPTER 6	British Fairies
CHAPTER 7	The Last Strum
CHAPTER 8	Back Where It All Began

CHAPTER 1 – Let Go

The red headed girl who looked to be about in her mid-twenties walked up to Australia Zoo. She was wearing mustard yellow overalls and a navy blue shirt with dark faded rainbow stripes. Her face was dotted with freckles and her one green eye, one blue eye shimmered with kindness and a type of lightness that you can only see in caring people. It was 7 o'clock at night and she was scheduled for a night shift.

"Damn it" she mumbled as it started to pelt down rain and cars with blazing headlights splashed her sneakers.

She just got back from an unwanted encounter with her obnoxious neighbours, and was in a very bad mood. She was exhausted and just wanted to go home and sleep. She sprinted for the entrance to the zoo as thunder and lightning started to hammer down on her home town, the Sunshine Coast.

"Hey Alex"! called one of her co-workers. "The boss wants to talk to you".

"Ok, get outa this rain soon though, your gonna catch a cold" she replied. She hurried inside, grateful for the opportunity to dry off while helping out with a **community** of animals who are way better than the human community.

"Hey Boss, what can I help you with?" she asked, while shuffling across his office to get closer to the heater.

The Boss sighed and told her "We're down to our last dollar Alex, I can't have any more workers than necessary. Since you only work the night shift because of your busking and your other co-workers do both day and night.... I'm going to have to let you go." He paused to let the weight of what he just said settle on her shoulders. Alex felt crushed. She opened her mouth to reply, but he continued.

"I know you're a way better worker than most, especially Bridget and that idiotic handyman I sent fix the cafeteria A/C. Stupid old man couldn't fix a thing, always wanting to give advice on how to run MY zoo instead of doing what I pay him to do". He mumbled the last part just loud enough for her to hear.

"However I know you love both the animals and your guitar, and you can have a bright future as a musician, while the rest of this talentless bunch can't do anything. So I'm letting you go, and I'm truly sorry to do so".

If it was anyone else, they might have tried to negotiate a way around the decision, but because Alex was shy, she didn't. She was just so shocked that she would no longer see all the animals she took such care of, even if there did seem to be at least something wrong with one of them at all times.

"I...I understand" She stuttered and sighed. "What do I do to make a living now? Will I ever see my beautiful fairy penguins and gentle elephants again?" she thought distressfully.

She rushed home as she fought back tears. "Stop it Alex", she told herself. "You're over reacting, there will be other jobs". Her heart felt hollow as she hurried back to her apartment. She was too miserable to even change clothes.

She flopped onto her bed and felt all energy leave her body. She fell asleep, curled up like a child hiding from the world, and stayed that way 'till the morning.



CHAPTER 2 – A Mysterious Donor

You know that one blissful moment when you wake up, halfway through the land of the sandman and reality, where you manage to forget all your problems and simply live? This is what Alex felt as she awoke. The early morning sun hit the window, and fractured into a thousand needles of light piercing the air ... and then it hit her. The zoo, the boss, the storm. It all came rushing back.

She needed money, fast. It was almost time for her to pay her rent, and without it she would be kicked out. Terrified of this, she resorted to what she knew; busking. She packed up her guitar, her **canvas** bag and her old checked hat and headed for her favourite place in the city – a walking bridge overlooking a river.

It was a beautiful place, where people came to jog, walk their dogs and marvel at the wonder that is nature. She set herself down on a bench, and placed the hat in front of herself. She began to slowly strum her battered old guitar. Her music was attracting the occasional coin here, five dollar note there, but business wasn't good.

Then something caught her eye; a brief glimpse of a silhouette of a man, and then a coin fell into her hat. It seemed ancient, yet it shined like it was brand new. The coin depicted a faded man, feeding a giraffe out of the palm of his hand. The edges were rusted and jagged, but she got the impression that it was indestructible. Alex knew it was silly, but she couldn't shake the feeling that this coin was **magic**.

She jumped to her feet, knocking her pick into her hat as she did. Guitar swinging at her side, she raced after the man.

"Hey!" she yelled. "Wait up!" The man kept strolling at a leisurely pace, despite the fact that she was yelling at him. Alex finally caught up with him, and he turned around.

He looked to be around 60 or 70 years old, and had many years of laughter etched into his face. He was dressed in an oversized shirt, and battered suspenders held up his loose cargo pants. Silvery, flyaway hair framed his kindly blue eyes, and a beard of the same colour reached his collarbone. Threadbare fingerless gloves encased his hands. He wore work boots that had seen many years, and white socks that had been yellowed by time.

"Did you give this to me?" Alex demanded, holding up the coin. The old man simply smiled a mysterious smile.

"What is it?", she queried again, more quietly this time.

"You will know soon, girl. Use it well", he replied in a gravelly voice.

"Who are you?", she asked, now barley speaking above a whisper.

"Me? I'm just The Handyman", he replied, again with that smile.

There was a loud crash behind her, and Alex spun around in fright. A man was running away into the distance, with her hat in hand! She tried to give chase, but he was just too far ahead, and by the time she turned back around, the "Handyman" had disappeared.

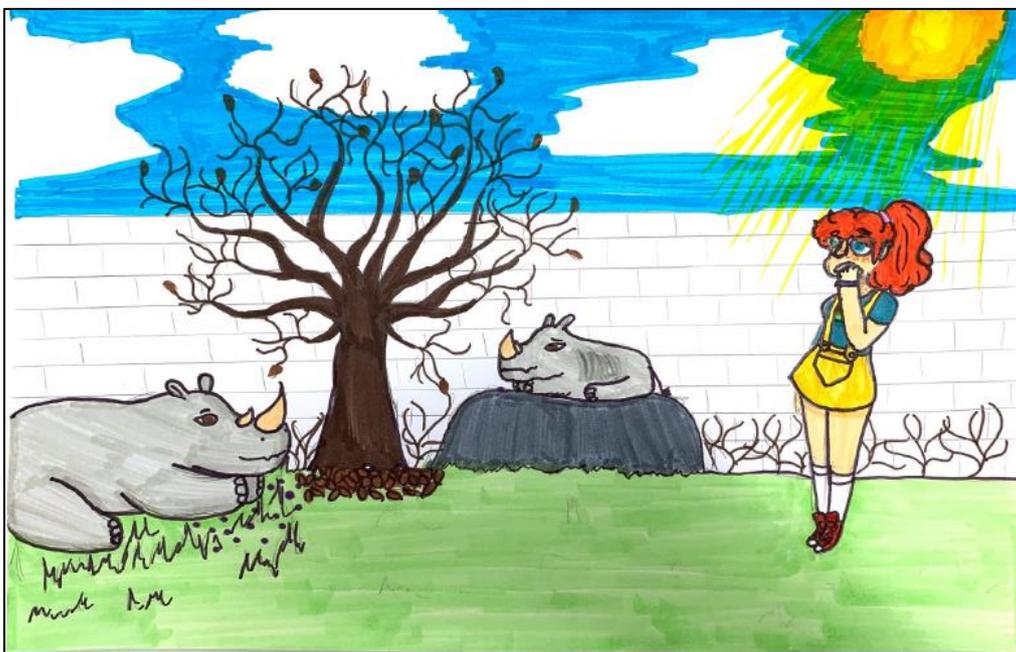
Disheartened, she sat down again and begun absent-mindedly strumming her guitar with the coin. Then the music began to pick up speed, even though she wasn't playing that fast. She stopped playing altogether, yet the music continued to steadily grow louder and faster. She clasped her guitar case in fear. Suddenly, a warm wind swirled around her, picking up autumn leaves and making them dance and weave, until she couldn't see anything but bright flashes of orange and red. And then, darkness.



CHAPTER 3 – Pursuit of Happiness

Throwing her hands in front of her and forcing her eyes shut. A blur of light pierced through the slits between her eyes before a sudden impact interrupted her timeless fall. Adjusting to the brightness of the light, she found herself looking around at her surroundings, piecing together the various objects that obstructed her line of sight. It was a disturbing sight. There were trees bare of any branches and numerous piles of decomposing leaves, looking nothing more than dust mounds. She slowly arose, clutching her guitar and trying to imagine what kind of horrid place she was in.

An abrupt sound filled her ears, rumbling the dirt patches beneath her feet, and rustling the scarce amount of leaves still clinging to the trees. That's when she saw them. Dull grey rhinos protruded from the ground, almost camouflaging into the dirt. She stood shocked, astounded that the animals in the enclosure had been treated so badly. These rhinos didn't even appear to look like the majestic beasts they were supposed to resemble. Their eyes were sunken in, their ribs appeared through their skin, their nails were cracked in all the wrong places. Alex knew the zoo hadn't been doing too well, but not to the extent of what she was witnessing.



“Why is she here?”

“Those humans never do anything other than watch us suffer.”

Alex could understand them. Confusion clouded her mind. Rhinos weren't supposed to talk, let alone she wasn't supposed to understand them. However, there, in the corner of the enclosure, stood a single rhino, skin glowing and horn high in the air. Lush green grass encased the ground close to the entrance. Alex couldn't believe her eyes. While the rest of the rhino's lay there suffering and hungry, this rhino was living its life, eating whenever it wanted to. Even if the other rhinos were wary of her, she couldn't leave them in the state she had found them. With one final look of the malnourished rhinos that lay before her, she **skipped** over to the horned beast, intending for the best outcome. Even if it was no longer her job to care for these animals, she couldn't leave without saving them. She walked over to it and coughed, announcing her presence. With one glance, he looked over and seemed to shrug, not caring that Alex was waiting to speak to him.

“Excuse me Mr. Rhino, do you realise the damage you are doing to the others in this enclosure.”

“No. Why would I care?”

“Well, these other rhinos are suffering, just take a look at the environment they are in. They have no rational food, no shade. Are you seriously going to let them perish there?”

“What do you want me to do, share? If so, that’s not going to happen.”

Looking beyond the enclosure, she saw two men carrying a large box together, a civilian and a... Handyman. Suddenly, she understood how the others were managing to survive. Together. They were able to live by sticking together. she huffed,

“Keep this selfish behaviour up then. Watch these animals suffer. In the end, it will only be you left. How would you like that, being left alone in this enclosure?”

With a reluctant sigh, he slowly trudged over and grumbled a small “fine”. Announcing the excellent news, the rhinos began to stand up, and slowly made their way over to the lush green grass. Finally, they seemed to be happy. To try and bring light to the fact she was going to be stuck in the rhinos enclosure, she opened her guitar case and picked up the coin that The Handyman had given her and began strumming once again. Suddenly, a blanket of darkness covered her eyes.

CHAPTER 4 – A Matter of Pride

Alex stumbled as the now-familiar whooshing sensation ceased, and she dropped with a thud onto the hard dirt. Her vision swam as her surroundings became clear. Their shaggy manes were the first thing she spotted. Her heart raced as the two male lions approached her, their jaws snarling. She closed her eyes.

“STOP.”

She suddenly roared, leaping up. The two lions froze, and cocked their heads.

“Y-you can speak?” the smaller of the two (whose name she later discovered was Rex), squeaked out.

“Yes...” She said, still slightly trembling. “I have come to solve a problem.”

“Well, we don’t *have* a problem.” the larger lion announced, swishing his long mane.

“But-but I was transported here... there must be a rea-” She was cut off by a ferocious roar that echoed around the enclosure.

The lions halted, meekly cocking their heads towards the direction of the noise. Rex turned to her and whispered,

“Yeah.... We might have a tiiiiny problem.”

Alex shivered as she made her way towards the sound, wincing as the sound grew louder. A second pair of lions were fighting, each one getting more and more agitated with each blow. The lions watched in fear, each one scrambling away when a lion was smashed into the ground. She watched, entranced. The lions were shouting, each shooting insults at each other.

“YOU WILL NEVER BE KING!” the dark-haired lion roared, swatting his brother with a flick of his paw.

“OH YEAH? WELL, YOU-YOU ARE A DISGRACE TO THE LIONS NAME!” the sandy lion responded, kicking his brother in the chest.

“What happened?” she asked, turning to Rex, who was watching with little to no interest.

“Since their father left, these two bozos have been fighting for the throne. Man, it is so annoying!” Rex sighed. “Please make it stop.”

“But how do I do that?” Alex asked, already nervous.

“Well, all you need to do is to attract their attention”, Rex said simply.

“With what?”

“With the drum.” Rex sighed, and turned away.

Alex shook as her gaze landed upon the giant wooden drum perched on the top of a rock. Nonetheless, she trekked up the rock, and perched on top of it. She jumped as high as she could. The sound echoed through the enclosure, deafening the lions’ roars, ceasing the fighting.

“Hello”, She said calmly, walking up to the lions’.

“Who in the world are you?” the sandy lion exclaimed, walking up to the intruder.

“I am here to help.” She said, trying to stay calm. “Now, why are you two fighting?”

The two brothers looked at each other with embarrassment. "I didn't want him to be king." The dark-haired lion mumbled.

"What? I just didn't want *him* to be king!" the sandy lion said, his eyes wide.

"Well since neither of you want to be king, is there anybody here who will take on the responsibility?"

"I will!" interrupted a new voice.

A young lioness emerged from the shadows, her eyes bright. "I've always dreamed of ruling this pride." She said. As she watched the lions rejoice, her eyes flickered over to a shadow, creeping into the forest. She blinked, and it was gone. That was her cue.

Alex lifted her guitar, and strummed it hard. Her form began to flicker, and she was gone.



CHAPTER 5 – Last Hope

Her stomach coiled as she felt herself falling through the portal to which seemed like her impending doom. Bracing herself for the impact she had come to expect, the feeling of chill, slimy water against her skin was unprepared for. She gasped for air as the filthy water gushed down her throat. Alex swam towards the surface, clutching the guitar as she followed the bright sunlight through the murky green abyss.

Suddenly, a dull grey trunk slithered through the dirty water, snaking around her waist and heaving her out. Alex felt herself being placed on the dry ground; her legs prickled by the sharp blades of grass. As the elephant uncoiled its trunk from her shivering body, she peered around at her surroundings, gazing at her tall savior. His eyes sunken, glazed over and filled with dejection. The big friendly giants she loved were living in misery and pain. Alex placed her forehead on the animal's trunk.

"Who...What did this to you?"

"Alex, it's always been like this."

Only when the elephant moved his head towards the other end of the enclosure did she see the true horror that lay before her. The waterhole, green with thick and slimy algae, the trees, dead and lifeless, from the lack of irrigation. The dull elephants were parched and starving, lying on the ground in dismay.

"The pipes - they've been broken for a while now... the zoo can't afford to fix it." The elephant sighed.

"Please help us Alex, the sprinklers are connected to the pipe that leads to the waterhole." One of the female elephants cried, signaling towards the pipe.

"You're our only hope."

Determined, Alex made her way towards the pipes, stirring up the dust as she sprinted across the enclosure. The pipes stood in front of her, dusty and murky. A clear blockage presenting itself as an obstacle for the water to travel through. The ball of clumped up leaves and dirt were preventing the water to go through to filtration, which was also blocking the path towards the sprinklers. She knew what she had to do. Despite the spinning of her stomach from the thought of the filthy water, she dove into the deep pool. Reaching the pipe, she hesitantly slid her hand in, grabbing nothing but water. The fear of the unknown was building up inside her as she reached in further, pulling her body closer to the pipe. Finally, she felt her fingers graze the rough ball. Feeling confident, she clawed at the dirt and leaves, feeling the occasional whooshes of water on her face as water started to be sucked through the pipes once again. Her eyes and lungs began to burn as the need for air raced through her mind.

"No. I need to finish this," she thought.

A reassuring pop brought a smile to Alex's face, as the pipe started to suck the dirty water back in. Despite the ringing in her ears she could hear the elephants rejoicing above her. She swam up back to the surface feeling her confidence rise.

"Thank you so much, Alex! It looks like our waterhole and meals will be back to normal soon," the male elephant rejoiced, pulling her in for a hug with his trunk.

A familiar face beyond the enclosure brought a surprised look to her face, his smug smile drawing her in. However, just as fast as he had appeared, he was gone. Alex was sure it was him.

Her guitar case glinted in the light as she said her goodbyes and pulled out her golden coin. Wishing the elephants the best, she strummed the keys before yet again falling into darkness.



CHAPTER 6 – British Fairies

“Ugh” Alex groaned as she pulled herself out of the frozen water wondering why the zoo had a cold swimming pool in one of the enclosures.

She held tightly onto her guitar case and made sure that the **magic** coin that had led her on this strange adventure was still in secure in her pocket and looked around her. It was unusually cold for the Sunshine Coast in Autumn. There were six tiny fairy penguins staring up at her expectantly and another six running rather frantically around the small outcrop of land chasing each other.

‘Ohhhh this must be the fairy penguin enclosure,’ she thought, ‘that explains the temperature. But I’m sure that there was ice before’.

“Hey there.” Alex said softly. She placed her guitar down before crouching down to the adorable creatures, her soaking sneakers squelching as she did so.

“Ello there miss.” said one of the fairy penguins in a heavy British accent that Alex was not expecting.

“Hey there” she replied, turning to face the penguin that had spoken to her.

“Can you could help us miss?” the penguin spoke.

“Sure, what can I do?” Alex replied, happy to help the penguins.

“Well our carer set the thermostat too high, now all the ice has melted.” Said a penguin who sounded rather bitter.

“Well that shouldn’t be too hard to fix.” She replied cheerfully. The penguin keeper had taught her how to care for the penguins but had neglected to tell her where the thermostat was. “Where’s the thermostat?” she asked to the group, looking around the room, then she spotted it. It was all the way on the other side and there was no way to reach it other than through the ice-cold water that Alex had no desire to return to or a tiny ledge covered in water that protruded out of the walls. Alex placed the coin into her guitar case to stop it getting wet and tentatively placed one red-shoed foot on the ledge and was surprised to find that it held, but that didn’t help how slippery it was. One careful step after another she made her way to the thermostat. She was so close, but one foot slipped plunging her in to the frigid water below. When she resurfaced, she was gasping for air and her fiery red hair was plastered against her face, her ponytail now sopping wet. She took a second to catch her breath before slowly climbing back onto the narrow ledge. It took Alex three attempts, but she was finally back on the ledge and able to reach the thermostat. She quickly twisted the dial to the right temperature and then unceremoniously fell back into the water.

When Alex was on land again, she spotted something out of the corner of her eye. It seemed to be the shadow of an old man. She was almost certain that she had seen him before, the boots, the beard, even the same cargo pants held up by tattered suspenders. He always seemed to be around her.

She finally said her farewells to the penguins and pulled out the coin, strumming the guitar before being whisked away in a flurry of snow and ice.



CHAPTER 7 – The Last Strum

The swirl of snow slowed to a stop, resting on Alex's wet shoulders and gathering in white clumps in her wavy auburn hair. She picked up her guitar, placing it in her cold guitar case, before pocketing the golden coin again. She seemed to be on what seemed like dusty plains underneath an acacia, needles of sun coming through the leaves.

A noise reverberated around her, a weird groaning sound, low in pitch but high in aggression. She stood up, clutching her guitar case so hard her knuckles went white. She found herself face-to-face with an agitated giraffe. Nostrils flaring, the giraffe began cantering around what she now realised to be an animal enclosure. Yet again, she had been transported to another pen in Australia Zoo. The giraffe began speeding up, galloping around in circles while she huddled beneath the tree.

Alex glanced around for some sort of escape; but saw nothing that could help her in any way at all. Out of all of the animals she had seen so far today this was by far her least favourite. As she turned around, she thought she saw a vague silhouette of another person watching her, but when she turned back again there was nothing there. She fell onto her knees in despair, wondering how she could possibly get out of this one.

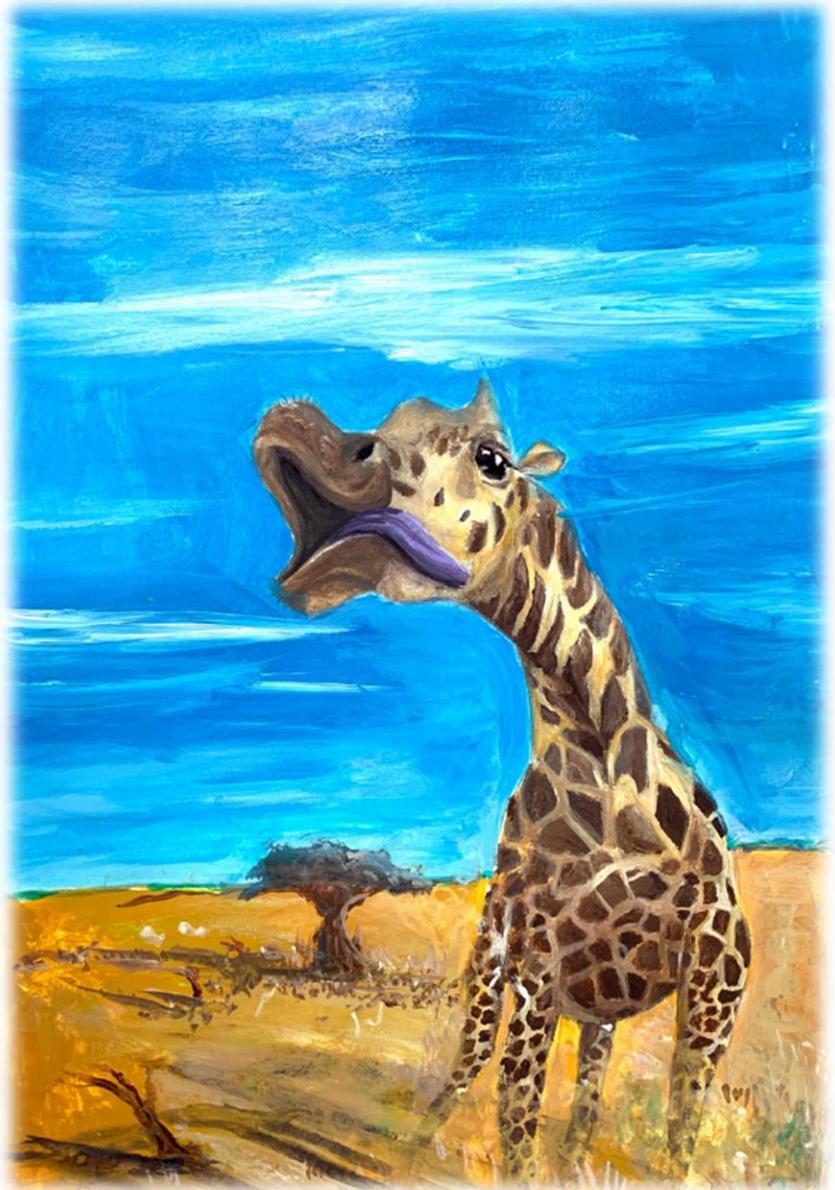
Alex looked down at her hands, her fingers wrapped tightly around the guitar handle, before promptly realising the answer had been with her the whole time. The coin. Her guitar. She quickly unzipped the case, grabbed her guitar, and slid the leather strap over her shoulders. She pulled the **magic** coin out of her front pocket, and thought of the song she wrote a few weeks ago. Her fingers traced the chords of the song, then she began strumming along, and the gentle sound of relaxing guitar music ricocheted around the enclosure.

The giraffe began slowing, before it came to a halt directly in front of Alex. She carried on playing, the giraffe so close his breath made the ends of her hair dance in the breeze. It stooped its neck lower so that Alex found herself looking at two big brown eyes, protected by long lashes. Alex stopped playing, lowering her hands, the golden coin still clasped between her fingers.

She heard a voice, not sure whether it was in her head or someone else – or even the giraffe for that matter.

The voice said, "Use the Gift wisely."

She looked down at the golden coin, still emanating what looked like rays of sunshine, but something stopped her from giving it away. "My last dollar," she thought. There was still the monthly rent to pay. She looked at it again, then held her hand up to the giraffe's whiskery nose. The giraffe sniffed the coin warily, then stuck out its large purple tongue and swallowed it in one gulp.



She heard a voice again, urging her on.

“You know what to do,” the voice said.

“I wish that the zoo wouldn’t close its doors,” she whispered.

She felt the wind around her start moving quicker, ruffling up her flame-coloured hair and pulling her off of her feet. Then everything went black.

CHAPTER 8 – Back Where it All Began

Alex opened her eyes groggily, wishing the morning hadn't come so soon. Reluctantly, she threw off her blankets, rolled out of bed and headed towards the bathroom to get ready for another day of busking. Downcast, she sulked to the kitchen and got her breakfast ready. The radio, usually regarded as white noise, suddenly caught her attention. Something about what they were saying sounded familiar. Then she heard it, "Due to unexpected behaviour changes in the animals, Australia Zoo will stay open!" Alex froze. Slowly the words sunk in and realisation hit her. She **skipped** around the kitchen, dancing and singing joyously. Without finishing her meal, Alex grabbed her guitar and headed to the zoo.

The familiar sign greeted Alex at the entrance, and a warm tingling feeling rushed through her, making her eyes tear up. She strolled through to the manager's office, taking in all the sights and smells and sounds she once took for granted. So engrossed in what was happening around her, she didn't realise someone had joined her.

"This place looks great now, huh?"

Alex spun around and realised it was her old boss. Caught off guard, she managed to stutter agreement.

"How would you feel if I told you that you can work here again, but as a performer?"

Alex tripped over her own feet as her mind struggled to comprehend the words. Work here? As a performer? It would be a dream come true. Alex graciously accepted the offer, almost doing her happy dance again. Her eyes grew wide when she saw the mass of people gathered at the performance area. She quickly gathered her wits and went up onto the stage. Alex opened her guitar case and quickly tuned the strings, then reached down absentmindedly into the case to grab the coin she had become used to using as a pick. What she found instead was a small drawstring bag, around the size of her hand. Inside, Alex found six new guitar picks, each with a different animal and colour. The first was mottled grey, with a rhino head engraved in the centre. The next was golden-brown with a lion head. The others followed the same pattern, another grey one with an elephant, white for penguins and a cream and brown blotched one for the giraffe. All were beautiful, but there was one that caught her eye. A golden pick that seemed to sparkle even in the dim light of the bag. An exact replica of the magical coin she used on her adventures was etched into it.

"There's something about this one," she mumbled to herself. "Something that **sings** to me."

Alex grabbed the shimmering pick and started strumming her first chord, gaining confidence with each stroke. When she looked up at the applauding crowd, she recognised a face at the very back. The same soft, mysterious smile spread across The Handyman's face, and he gave her a sly wink. She blinked and he was gone, like mist blown away by a soft breeze.

The last thing she remembered seeing was his kind, blue eyes, telling her that she was strong and could do anything she put her mind to.

Alex would remember that for the rest of her life.

Alex, an introverted guitarist, was fired from her job at a zoo that is struggling financially, and has to resort back to busking – playing her guitar to fund her monthly rent.

Little does she know, it is up to her to save the zoo from closing its doors forever. In a tale of talking animals and magical coins, Alex faces a number of challenges with an old Handyman as her guide.

This is a story of how your last dollar can go a long way.



Recommended for ages 10 and over