



TOOK

written and
illustrated
by Hail
and Well Met



Write a Book in a Day



**THE KIDS'
CANCER
PROJECT**
Science. Solutions. Survival.

PARAMETERS FORM 2019

TEAM DETAILS

STATE: WA

DIVISION: Open

SCHOOL/GROUP: Hail and Well Met

TEAM NAME: Hail and Well Met

TEAM ID: 592

PARAMETERS AND RANDOM WORDS

Parameters

Primary character 1 **Mime**

Primary character 2 **Magician**

Non-human character **Carnivorous plant**

Setting **Farm**

Issue **A haunting**

Random words

Community

Skipped

Magic

Canvas

Sings

INSTRUCTIONS

- Start at 8am
- Write an original story:
 - based on all **five parameters** (above)
 - including all **five random words** (above), and in bold type
 - with some identifiable **Australian content** (in theme or setting or characters, etc)
 - keeping within the allowed word count (remember every word on every page counts)!
 - include this parameters form in your book **immediately after the front cover** in both the hard and soft copy.
- Remember: **Every** word on **every page** counts. This includes your front cover, back cover, blurb, acknowledgements and copyright form.
- **Be sure to give yourself enough time to submit your book and complete the following checklist before 8pm.**

Log on to the Team Coordinator Portal to:

- Check the spelling of your team name and team members' names (how these are spelt on submission will be how they are displayed on certificates)
- Complete the Declaration
- Submit your finished book in **both** PDF and plain text format
- Mail a hard copy of your book on the next business day to:

Write a Book in a Day, The Kids' Cancer Project, PO Box 6400, Alexandria NSW 2015

Hail and Well Met writing and illustrating team:

Bernadette Nye
Tarran Merlo
Rachael Tindale
Cameron Tindale
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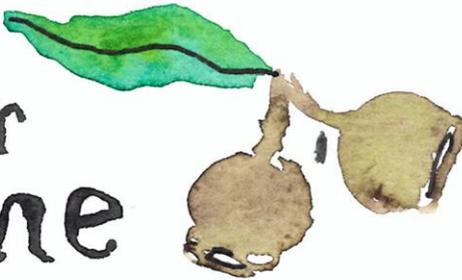
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For Lucca.



chapter
one

WINTERWOOD

Felix stretched and yawned as he heard the magpies carolling the world into wakefulness. For Felix, there was nothing better than that moment just before dawn, as a new morning stirs, in Winterwood. They'd be coming to their grandparents' farm in Gidgegannup since they were born. This was a place of **magic**.

Felix threw off his quilt and chucked on the old green army jacket that his Uncle Luke gave him for his tenth birthday. He wore that thing everywhere, slightly tattered and worn, but it kept him warm to the chilly Gidge air that he was about to enter. Still in his Batman flannel pyjamas and woollen socks, he traipsed into the laundry. Daisy, their bright-eyed Westie, welcomed him with a wag of the tail and a lick. She was his shadow whenever they visited. Quietly unlocking and opening the sliding door, so as to not wake his sister Hazel (she was not a morning person of late), he stepped out and slipped on his wellie boots. He shivered. Partly because the sun hadn't yet given the property a warm hug, and the mist hung thick in the air, partly in the excitement of the day before him. First there were chores to do. Felix found it strange that helping out on the property could be called chores. To him chores were his Mum asking him to clean the toilet or put his washing away when he was in the middle of practising his latest magic trick. Before breakfast he was to collect the eggs from Grandma's 'Old Girls', feed and groom the horses, and he had promised to help Grandad fix the irrigation first thing. Then he was free to go exploring. Adventuring might be the better term.

Daisy trotted off to do her business and sniff the many unknown things that dogs find interesting. Egg basket in hand Felix wandered down to the chook shed. The morning chorus was in full symphony now. Kookaburras, wattle birds, fantails, honeyeaters, wrens, maggies, the occasional pink and grey galah. They all seemed just as excited as Felix for this brisk morning, full of possibilities. They'd arrived last night. Mum and Dad finished work late, again, so they didn't reach Winterwood until after dark. Hazel was particularly grumpy when they arrived and realised her new phone would only work down by the gate. Grandma and Grandad said she could go down there and message her friends when it's light, and only after she'd done her chores. Hazel was not impressed and she let everyone know. Her not-so-subtle slamming of her bedroom door and sullen expression were enough to make a room feel darker than it was and colder than it ought to have been. Something was amiss with his twin recently. They had always done everything together and he loved her laugh. It was unique, not so much a chortle, but something bright and infectious. She had changed, and rarely laughed these days. His parents didn't seem to notice but that didn't really surprise him. It was a busy time of year for them and work took all their energy.

Felix was hopeful that maybe the next two weeks in Winterwood, before school started up again, would brighten Hazel's mood. Especially considering tomorrow was their thirteenth birthday.

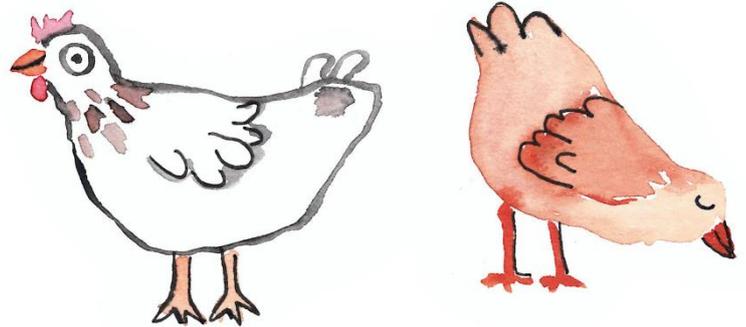
"Come on, Daisy, let's see how many eggs the girls have for us today." Felix called to his friend, as she nosed a frog from its comfortable perch on a stone by the pond. He could hear the hens clucking in anticipation of their morning ritual. Felix let them out of their corrugated palace greeting them by name as they trundled down their ramp onto the dewy grass.

"Morning Matilda, Ethel, Gretel. C'mon Beryl and Gertie. Come and enjoy your freedom."

Venturing around to the back of the shed, Felix lifted the hatch that gained access to the eggs. Grandma liked to encourage the girls to lay by placing a fake plastic egg in their boxes. "Just so they don't forget," she often said. Seemed a bit odd to Felix, but it looked like it did the trick today as there were six lovely big fresh ones, dotted with flecks of straw and grime. Perfect for Grandma's traditional cooked breakfast they have on the first morning of their visits.

BbrrrccCCCKKKK!! BBRRABUUURRRCKKK!!! Woof! Woof! WOOF!!

Suddenly, the sound of a commotion made Felix jump back, the hatch slammed shut with a clang! When Daisy and the hens made a fuss like that it only meant one thing. Foxes! Rushing to their aid, Felix was expecting the worst. Grandad had worked so hard on making the chook shed fox-proof, Felix did not want to be responsible for sending the old girls to their doom. Heart pumping in his ears, body ready to defend his animal family, Felix was confused by the sight before him. Daisy zoomed past him, yapping away and disappeared into the paddock behind the chook shed. The hens were frantically dashing around in circles, clucking their heads off, but there was nothing chasing them. Something had spooked them.



"What's the matter with you lot?" Felix asked, bewildered. "There's nothing there! You scared me!" The Old Girls seemed unconvinced and continued to cluck agitatedly and occasionally darted here and there. Feeling confused, Felix took another look around before shrugging his shoulders and turning back to complete his task. He called out to Daisy and she reappeared at his side with a quizzical look in her eye. Something felt odd though and Felix couldn't quite put his finger on what it was. That strange electrical feeling you get when watching a scary movie that makes the hairs on your neck and arms prickle. Shaking it off and putting it down to the adrenaline dump from the fright, Felix opened the hatch.

"Huh?!" he half grunted, half choked. The eggs were gone. All seven of them, including the plastic one. "What the...?" he trailed off, closing the hatch for a second time, re-opening it. Blinking repeatedly, brushing his blonde hair from his eyes. With a confounded expression he stumbled back, looked around his feet, in the empty basket, even his coat pockets. "Where are the eggs?" he spluttered. The hens must have sensed his unease and confusion and skittered up to him, clucking with rancour.

"I don't know what to tell you girls. Either I was half asleep and dreamed up your eggs or they've vanished into thin air. What am I going to tell Grandma?"

Appearing deflated, the hens quietened down again and slowly began wandering around looking for tidbits of grass and bugs. Daisy continued to sniff around the back of the chook shed. Feeling somewhat dazed and very confused, Felix left the chooks be, trying to convince himself that he must have been half asleep and the growing heaviness in his stomach was just hunger.

chapter two

THE SHADE HOUSE



As much as Felix enjoyed feeding the horses and seeing the giant dust clouds being stirred up in the morning light, as he gave them a good brushing down, the initial excitement of the day was now replaced with unease. Clouds were gathering in the west above the hills. Rain was on its way. Normally, Hazel and Felix enjoyed gallivanting around in the rain together. It wouldn't stop them. Felix doubted if Hazel was even up yet. He knew Grandad would be by now, though, so he set off back to the work shed to find him, Daisy in tow.

Sure enough, Grandad was all ready to go, with his favourite lemon sherbets stuffed in amongst the toolbox. One of his favourite stories was of buying these lollies back in Newcastle, when he was a boy. They were hard to get now, so it was a special treat that Felix's Aunt brought some back for Grandad from her recent holiday to the UK. Grandad was a quiet, thoughtful man, so it wasn't unusual for them to work in relative silence as they unclogged and repaired the irrigation in the rose garden. Daisy happily sat amongst them watching bees alight upon the lavender. After a time, Grandad said, "Felix, lad, could you please go into the shade house and get me a length of pipe. It's behind the clivia seedlings. Just watch out for the nasty weeds in that corner. They've got thorns. I just can't seem to get rid of them." Felix jumped up with a nod and disappeared behind the rainwater tank.

The shade house was built onto the side of Grandad's big work shed and contained all sorts of wonderful plants from around the world. Felix liked the moisture in the air from the fine misting sprinklers Grandad had put in to help the plants in the hot summer months. This time of year though, moss would grow on the old railway sleepers that were used as benches, and to Felix is



felt like a little rainforest. As Felix rounded the water tank and the shade house came into view, that feeling in his stomach started to deepen. A haziness descended in his thoughts and he felt unsteady on his feet. Taking a moment to regain his composure, he lent on an old grape vine trunk that encircled the tank. Just in the corner of Felix's eye, he saw it. Something moved in the shade house. Goosebumps rippled across Felix's skin. "Okay, what is going on?! Am I coming down with something?" Felix mused to himself. The dark green shade-cloth that covered the wire mesh structure was translucent enough to make out the shapes of the plants, but not enough for any detail. Reluctantly, Felix placed his hand on the latch, even though every part of him was telling him to get away, and now.

Somehow overriding this instinct, Felix entered the shade house. The dizziness enveloped him, with crackles of electricity and oppressive pressure forcing the air from his lungs. Gasping, he half pushed himself, half fell towards the corner containing the pipe and dragged it out. As his head starting to clear, he couldn't take his eyes off the weeds Granddad had mentioned. Darker than the usual invasive species known to the region. Tendrils spreading out from between earth and rock. It was only about the length of a ruler, and you could see where Granddad had repeatedly tried to poison and cut its outstretched limbs, thickened and scarred at the end. Weird little flowers, thorns, and globules of liquid peppered it. Certainly the strangest weed that Felix had ever seen. Coming to, properly now, Felix knew that something was happening here, something sinister.

chapter
three



THE VEGGIE
PATCH

Grandma wasn't too bothered with the fact that there were no eggs this morning, so Felix didn't volunteer the information about the plastic egg being missing too. His grandparents would probably put it down to his 'overactive imagination' or they'd just blame it on the resident poltergeist. Grandad liked to joke that because Winterwood is on a road called The Eyrie, that is sufficient explanation for any eerie goings on around the place. There was no point talking to Hazel about it. It would likely just give her ammunition to be cruel. As for his unnerving turn in the shade house, he'd rather not think about that right now.

Felix started to feel a bit better during breakfast. After a quick shower, he put on his jeans, jumper, and army coat, and headed outside. He was determined to find out what was going on. Daisy was out with Grandad by the dam, working on the windmill pump, and Grandma was doing watercolours in her studio. He could hear her from terrace. She often **sings** as she paints. He found Hazel sitting on the gate at the bottom of the red gravel driveway, hunched over, typing on her phone. He noted how her red hair matched the gravel beneath his feet. They received their first phones at the start of the school year as an early birthday present. Starting high school meant getting the bus, and Mum and Dad wanted the twins to have a phone each, in case of emergencies. Felix liked playing games on it occasionally, but preferred using his desktop computer. Hazel had been glued to her phone from day one. Barely lifting her gaze to him, Hazel abruptly muttered, "Where'd you put my shoelace?"

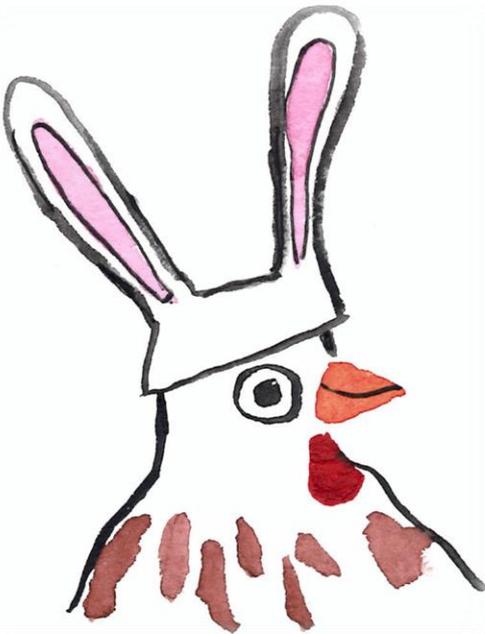
"Good morning to you too. What are you talking about?" Felix replied.

"Don't play dumb and stop being annoying. Just put my shoelace back in or else. I want to wear my red shoes to the party today."

“Umm, I’ve not touched your shoes. A. I know they’re your favourite and I value my life, and B. Gross. You’ve worn them every day since your last birthday. I don’t know why you would want to go to party today anyway. We just got here and you see your friends all the time.”

“Whatever. Just put it back. I’m sick of your childish games.” With that she slid down from the gate and **skipped** back up towards the house.

Shaking his head at Hazel’s changeable moods, Felix slowly meandered back to the chook shed hoping to find some clues. He chose to walk the long way round under the tall Ghost gums, keeping as far from the shade house as possible. The year was zooming by and Hazel was getting more and more distant. He could sort of understand that she would have new friends and maybe new interests since starting high school. He just didn’t expect them to grow apart so fast. She’d always loved his magic tricks, especially the one where he pulled Matilda out of a bucket (Grandma wouldn’t allow rabbits on the property as they invariably ate her veggies). Hazel almost fell over the first time Felix donned his magic cloak, presented an empty bucket to his family and proceeded to pull head hen, Matilda, out of the bucket wearing a pair of store-bought bunny ears, fastened with elastic around her little head. Felix always liked to improvise. He tried to make her laugh again during the autumn holidays, but she only mocked him for being a baby, with his silly tricks.



Before he even reached the chook shed he heard the front door slam and a thundering of feet down the driveway. Wanting to see if everything was okay, Felix made a beeline for the gate. “What’s wrong with Hazel now?” he mumbled under his breath.

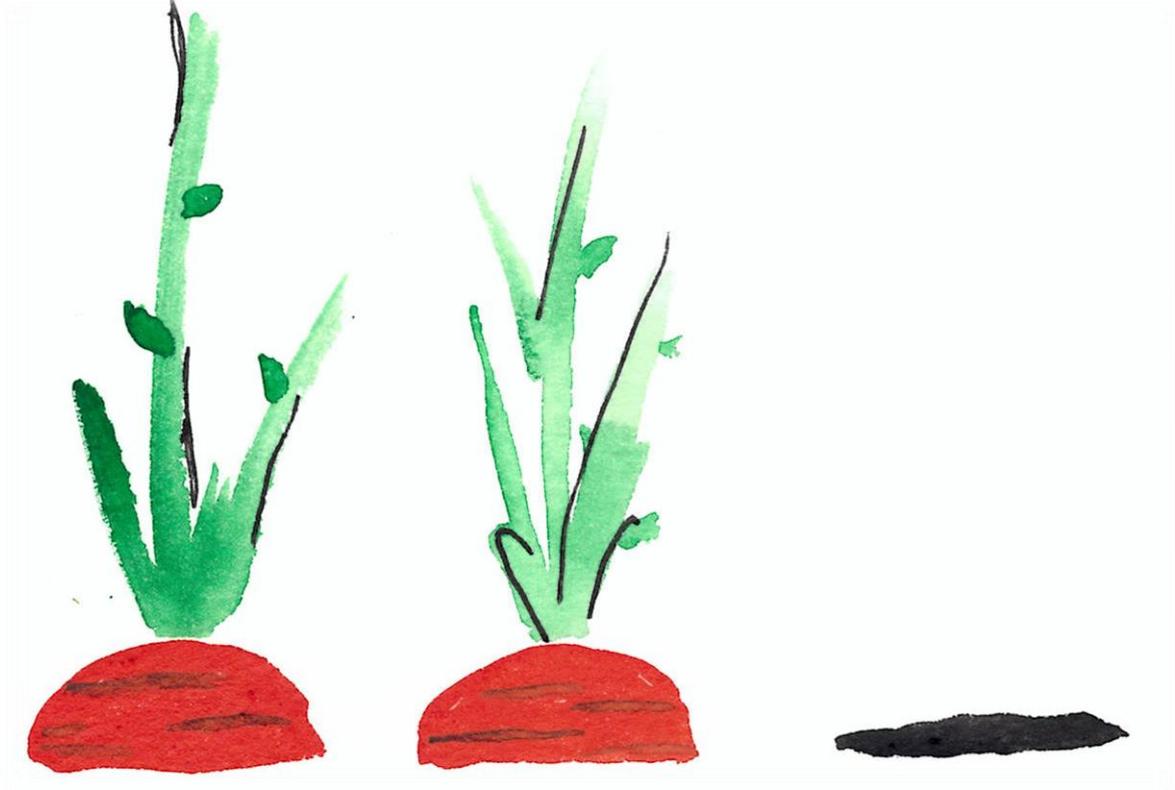
“I hate everyone!” Hazel shouted and stomped her feet. Felix was hesitant to engage when she was like this, but thought perhaps he could help broker peace.

“What’s up?” he inquired gently, as he approached.

“They won’t take me to the party! Apparently it’s not enough notice, it’s too far and they don’t think Mum and Dad would like me going to a boy/girl party. It’s my birthday tomorrow and they’re ruining it! They don’t care about me. All they do is work. How would they know what makes me happy? I hate them!” And with that final outburst, Hazel threw her phone. It lobbed high into the air and landed in the long grass amongst the conifers. She ran off again, eyes streaming with tears, knocking Felix as she passed. Felix heard a few doors slam and presumed she’d locked herself away in her room. As a deep sigh emanated from Felix, the rainclouds opened and large laden droplets began to patter the earth around him. His shoulders slumped, he trudged off in the direction of where he thought the phone landed.

The skies darkening further and the rain steadily getting heavier, Felix was beginning to lose hope of finding the phone, and it still being in working order. Sweeping his hands back and forth along the ground through the long wet grass, Felix was sure the phone had to be here. He had seen the grass move as it landed. Well, something had made the grass move. This was the third time today that his eyes had seemingly played tricks on him. In truth, it wasn’t just today. Surely Grandad’s poltergeist wasn’t real. He’d always spoken about it with a wry grin and twinkle in his eye. Just at that moment a muffled noise came from the veggie patch.

The sound wasn't natural. Well, not made by something in nature at least. It was oddly familiar but distorted somehow. Felix cautiously neared the gate to the veggie patch. The sound was louder but still indistinguishable. Suddenly, the tops of the carrots started moving as if something was crawling beneath them. Without even realising what he was doing, Felix flung open the gate and leapt onto Grandad's prized crop of carrots, and with a pop was gone.



chapter
four 
MARKET
 PLACE

Felix fell through darkness, flickers of coloured lights shooting past him as he picked up speed. He held tightly to whatever he had grasped, the only thing solid and it grounded him, literally, as he collided with solid earth second later. Despite the distance he fell and the speed with which he made contact with the ground, he was surprised to have let out only a minor *grunt* and graze his arm on a damp rock, although something was poking him sharply in the ribs. He felt movement beneath him and suddenly, out shot a figure that gave him a swift kick in the side, while it waved its arms about.

...frgee qiier drydsx!

“What?” Felix coughed as he tried to catch his breath. He stared at the greenish-tinged thing in front of him and couldn’t believe his eyes. It stood almost as tall as he did which, at almost thirteen, was just over a metre and a half, but it’s arms and legs where too long for its body, or, was it the other way around. Flexis *almost* laughed at the sight of it, with its long ears protruding out the side of its head, then let out a *snort* as it started making odd gestures with its arms and legs.

frgee qiier drydsx me, uww asd phjn drydsx me?!

“Umm, yes?” Felix answered questioningly. The thing didn’t seem to be actually speaking, but he could *hear* something every time it made a gesture.

The thing gave him a quizzical look, sighed, and its elongated arms slumped down to its side. Dejectedly it turned and motioned for Felix to follow. Cautiously Felix did, taking in the surroundings for the first time. They were in a tunnel of sorts, soft flecks of lights, the same that he had seen during the fall, illuminated the area and as they walked Felix could see the light increase in the distance. Jagged rocks poked out from the walls, but the path they were following looked well-trodden and was clearly in frequent use. Odd shoeprints and an unusual amount of

pawprints took Felix's attention, which was broken by some illegible mumbling from ahead. Felix looked up to see the thing waving its arms again.

U can't dshslwe lk qii drydsx me, Ut rjgjfh than that Took

"I'm sorry?" Felix said questioningly, "I didn't take anything. Where are we going anyway? Who are you? Why are you green?"

The thing grumbled something and kept walking, ignoring Felix's questions. He was about to ask again but a voice rang out ahead of them.

"You've done it now Took," a shrill, voice accompanied by a familiar *bah-gawk* echoed down the tunnel and the thing started waving its arms around in the direction of the voice.

Felix walked closer and was almost tripped over at the sight in front of him. The green coloured thing was waving its arms in the direction of a two-meter-tall chicken holding a long spear. The white body with distinct brown stripes down the neck, not to mention the bunny-ears sitting atop her head left Felix starrng gobsmacked as he stuttered, "Ma... tilda?!".

"Buck... yes little one. *Ca-cawww* what brings you here, and with Took no-less?" Matilda clucked towards Felix and scratched at the ground in front of her with her long, menacing, talon-like claws.

Felix gulped, "Took? I swear I didn't *take* anything."

"What are you, *bah-gawk*, talking about boy? This," she said accusingly pointing her spear at the green-thing, "is Took."

Took looked at Felix and pointed at himself, his face, his ears, and then gave himself a big hug.

yrt frgee caught me, U can't believe U wdr catch me.

"Took! If you're going to speak to everyone, then you need to make sure we can all see what you're saying!"

"See what he's saying?" Felix looked from Matilda to Took, his browed furrowed in confusion.

"Took's a mime, boy, *ca-caawwwww*, can't say a word from birth, but he can mime well enough that everyone knows what he says."

Took flailed his arms around again, but Felix could see a pattern and a sense of realisation washed over him, "I can understand you!"

"*Bah gawk*, I wouldn't call it understanding, but it's easy enough to know he means food when he pretends to eat."

"No, no, I can... *hear* him," Felix looked towards Took, "say something else, anything."

Took waved his arms around, "yrt mean something wces this?"

"Yes, yes, more, I think I'm getting the hang of this," Felix was almost jumping up and down in excitement.

As if all at once, Took the *said*, “well, I am happy to converse with you about the amazing socio-political aspects of this vivid and varied world in which I live. Perhaps I can interest you in a tour of the long-lost ruins of...”

“Woah! Slow down!” Felix interrupted, shaking his head, “too much, maybe keep it simple for now.”

“Fine,” a little disappointed, Took continued, “now that you’re here, you might as well come with me for now. I can take you home once I’ve finished my chores.” Took turned and started walking past Matilda and was stopped suddenly, a spear point pressed against his bare, green, chest.

“*BAH-GAWK!* Not so fast there! You know you can’t bring visitors to The Farm. Especially not *human* visitors.”

Felix looked up into Matilda’s large, black eyes as she flicked her glance between Took and Felix.

“Fine, *buck*, fine... just don’t go telling anyone that I am going soft, I’ve got a few years of laying ahead of me still and *bah-gawk* it won’t do giving people that sort of impression.”

“Thanks,” Felix cheerfully said and he followed Took out of the tunnel. Behind him he heard a shout.

“You owe me some extra feed for this Felix *bah-gaaaawwwwwk!*” shrilled Matila, fading into the distance.

Took led Felix down a series of winding paths and came to a small, dusty, plain. In the distance, Felix could see the myriad glow of light shining out against the otherwise dark and ominous surroundings.

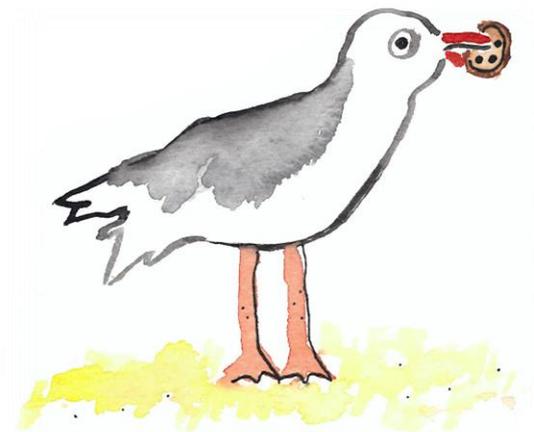
“What’s that, over there?”

“That would be the marketplace. I need to see a gull about a button,” Took explained, flapping his arms like a seagull and making small circular motions up and down where buttons on a shirt would be.

“A button?”

“Just keep your head down in there. We *do* get the occasional human finding their way into our world, you’re all too inquisitive for my liking, but it would still pay to not bring any undue attention to yourself.”

They continued walking and Felix began to hear the sounds of a crowd, occasionally interrupted by the raucous belly-laugh of a kookaburra, the shriek of a chuditch, or the deep growl of a koala and a sense of apprehension grew as they approached the outer edge of the marketplace. From his position, Felix could only catch glimpses of the inside, a flash of rainbow colours, muted to greys as the crowd inside passed by. A *thud, thud, thud* of heavy footsteps preceded a large shadow stepping forward to block his view entirely.



“Entry fee,” said a deep brutish voice.

Took pulled something out of his pouch and placed it on an old set of metal scales. Felix didn’t notice what he was saying, too caught up in the vast figure in front of him to pay attention. Moments later, Took stepped around the beast and Felix went to follow, only to feel a heavy paw upon his shoulder.



“Entry fee,” rumbled the voice.

“You... you’re a wombat, right?” enquired Felix, confident that wombats, like chickens, shouldn’t ever be as large as a human size, but seeing the evidence in front of him, he chose not to state this particular point of view.

“Yep, what an observant one you are,” the wombat sarcastically replied, “no entry fee, then, well, no entry,” it finished, matter-of-factly.

“I, I don’t have any money,” nervously Felix felt his pockets to double check.

“Money? Money’s no good here. You’ve got plenty you *can* pay with though – those are some lovely laces.”

“What?”

“Laces, your shoe-laces.”

“But then my shoes won’t work.”

“Fair enough, what else have you got then?”

“Ummm,” Felix drove his hands into his pockets, hoping to find something the wombat might consider as payment. “What about this?” Felix pulled out a die he had been using from his magic set.

“Let’s throw it on the scale and see shall we?”

The die was placed on the scales and immediately *slammed* down onto the tabletop.

“That’s good, right?” Felix questioned hopefully.

The wombat was clearly surprised by the die and greedily snatched it up from the scales as he replied to Felix, “ahh, yeah, it’ll do. Alright, you can head in.”

The wombat stepped to the side and the myriad of sites, colours, and smells enveloped Felix as he stepped forward. He was reminded of the markets he had attended with his grandparents on occasion, but everything was louder, more vibrant, and much more chaotic.

“GET YOUR SOAP HERE!” Felix turned to see a stall offering used soap, “AGED AT LEAST 3 WEEKS, GUARANTEED!” the shopkeeper yelled to passers-by.

“TOOTHBRUSHES, BRISTLED TOOTHBRUSHERS, FULLY BENT, COMPLETELY USED UP!” another stall owner, a platypus by the looks of it, shouted as Felix wondered aimlessly through the cacophony of his surroundings. He was jostled and bounced from stall to stall constantly in awe, and slightly disgusted at the site of the odd items for sale until he felt a blackened claw around his forearm.

“Need a dummy, boy?” a slight *cawing* echoed out from the words as the hairs on the back of Felix’s neck stood on end. “Oh yes... looks like you need one of these dummy’s,” the crow lifted its wing and revealed a dozen or more dummy’s hanging from a thin chain. “Some of them still have saliva on them, you’ll not find better elsewhere.”

“No, I... I’m fine,” stammered Felix, uncomfortably trying to step back into the crowd.

“Nonsense... come, come, *caww*” the crow pulled at him, bringing him closer and it lifted its other wing, “I have hair ties too,” it looked conspiratorially over Felix’s shoulder to make sure no one was watching, “still with hair wrapped around them *caww*, from a four year old.”

Felix jerked his arm, but the crow held tight, panic rose in his chest and his started breathing heavily as he tried desperately to get away.

Cawwww cawwwwwwww cawwwwww!

The crow frantically let go of Felix as Took came running at it, bawling it over and scattering the assortment of dummy’s and hair ties to the ground amongst a cloud of black feathers.

“Look what you’ve done, *cawwww!*” the crow angrily screeched at Took, “why don’t you *mime* your own business you silly taker.”

Took put his hands on his belly and pretended to chuckle, “oh very clever, *mime* my own business,” and then made a surprisingly ferocious face while pointing back at Felix, “you stay away from him, predator,” before Took pulled Felix kindly away from the crow.

“I thought I told you to keep a low profile,” Took said, shrinking himself down to a shorter stature.

“What *is* this place? Why would I want used soap? That stall is selling buttons, just buttons, why would anyone need to shop at a stall that *just* sells buttons?”

“Calm down, you’re OK,” Took reassuringly placed his green long-fingered hand on Felix’s shoulder and handed him a heavy **canvas** cloak he’d been carrying.

Draping over his shoulders, with the help of Took, Felix breathed deeply, “it’s heavy, and it smells funny.”

“It’s **canvas** – imbued with the highest quality lemon myrtle oil, cost me a whole marble that did, so you’d better appreciate it,” Took showed Felix how to put the cloak on.

“I’m not cold or anything.”

“It’s not for the cold,” Took said dismissively waving the comment away with a brush of his hand, “not only will this cloak hide some of your more questionable fashion choices, but it will keep your essence from being quiet so, *visible*.” Took hid behind his hand on the last word and continued, “lemon myrtle has some excellent antioxidant properties you know.”

“And that’s good? Hang on, my *essence*?”

“Just stick close to me,” he replied standing almost on top of Felix.

Felix nodded and followed Took as he went about his business at the marketplace, popping into a stall here, waving his arms around in an attempt to drive a better deal from a stall there. They walked by a stall selling keys, not blank keys to be cut to size, just random keys. Felix was about to ask Took where the keys come from when he overhead a sale at a sock stall between the Pelican owner and her client, an animal he didn’t quiet recognise, “I need a sock, right?”

“Certainly, one right sock, coming right up,” the Pelican eagerly responded.

“No, a left sock, right?”

“Ohh, we haven’t got any rights left.”

“That’s alright, I’ll just have a left.”

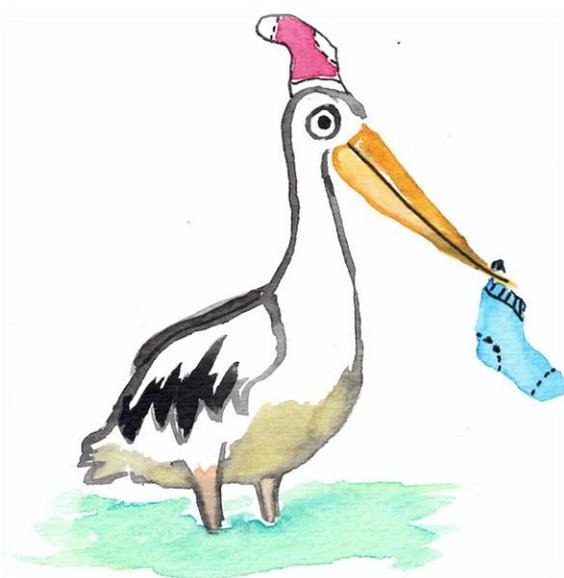
“Right you are sir.”

Felix leaned over to Took and whispered, “why does anybody need just one sock?”

“Well, maybe they only bought one shoe,” Took replied distractedly, “come on.”

“But that makes even less sense,” Felix mumbled to himself as he followed behind Took.

Feeling more than a little out of place, Felix noticed a stall that gave him a sense of familiarity. So far everything had seemed weird, odd, or at the very least out of place, but seeing a lolly stall up ahead, Felix’s heart **skipped** a beat. He made his way over and a familiar sickly sweet lemon scent wafted over him. At the very front was an open container of lemon sherbet lolly’s just like the ones his grandfather kept stashed away his in work shed, behind the jar of assorted screws he didn’t realise Felix could reach. In fact, Felix looked more closely at wrapping and called out, “Took, Took! These lemon sherbet’s I swear they are exactly like the ones Grandad has!”



“Well, they’re probably his, aren’t they,” Took replied distractedly.

“But how would they have my Grandad’s lemon sherbets, they’re from overseas?” Felix asked, mesmerised by the lolly’s in front of him. After a few seconds of silence, Felix pulled his eyes away, “Took? Took?! Where did you go?!”

Felix ran out into the crowd, jumping up to see if he could spot his green-skinned companion. A chuditch scampered in front of him and he was jostled to the side, coming face to face with a large dugite in front of a shoe-lace stall.

“Buying or ssssselling?” the brown snake’s tongue flicked out of its mouth in anticipation of the sale, or bargain the was to come.

“Ummm, neither,” Felix replied uncomfortably.

A little disheartened, but never willing to give up on a potential opportunity, the snake looked down at Felix’s shoes, “thossssse are sssssome nice...”

“Shoelaces, yeah, I’ve heard...” Felix interrupted, looking around in the hope of spotting Took.

“Oh, well, no need to be rude. I’m ssssorry, but if you’re not buying, I’ve got other cusstomerssss...” the snake turned from Felix and towards a koala who was embarrassingly tugging at the top of his pants.

“Oh hello ssssir, quiet a lovely ssssselection today, ssssuch vibrant colourssss... That one, oh yesssss, very fresh, brought in only this morning... Abssssolutely, would you like it gift wrapped? Oh asss a belt, wonderful idea! Yessss, truly sssssuperb!”

The snake lifted the shoelace and passed it to the koala who took it and started looping it through the top of his pants, tying it off and looking pleased at his new purchase. Felix was startled to realise the shoelace was the *exact* same colour and type as Hazels. Felix was starting to realise there was more going on here than he cared to admit. The koala made to walk off and Felix couldn’t stop himself.



“Excuse me sir! I think, that might be my sisters’ shoe-lace”

“Well, it’s mine now mate.”

“No, you don’t understand, she lost it this morning, she said that I took...”

“Lovely story mate, but my lunch break is almost over,” the koala said as he walked away.

“Wait!” shouted Felix as he shuffled the heavy **canvas** cloak around his shoulders and tried to follow the koala through the busy crowd. He was *sure* it was Hazel’s shoelace and he had to get it back, determined, he pressed on, weaving in and out of the crowd. After no more than a minute the crowd started thinning out, and then opened out into a wide space. In front of him, was a tall building overrun by growth. Twisted branches broke through

where windows would have been, long snake-like vines wound themselves down to the ground, and throughout it all, the visible signs of Lantana, something his grandfather described as “just a horrible weed” coiled itself around. The purple flowers of Paterson’s Curse, *another of my Grandads’ favourites* – thought Felix, lay between where he stood and the building, where the koala opened and door and entered.

CRASH!

So focussed on the koala, Felix didn’t see Took until he had collided with him.

“Urgh, this is the second time you’ve landed on top of me, please don’t make it a habit,” Took complained to Felix. Standing up and dusting off his pouch, Took looked down at Felix.

“What were you doing here?” Took queried, “this area is dangerous.”

Felix saw the concern in Took’s eyes and explained, “that koala took my sister’s shoelace, the one she accused me of taking this morning, I’ve got to get it back!”

Took looked uncomfortable, but Felix couldn’t tell if it was because of his earlier concern, or for some other reason.

“Well, if he’s gone in there,” Took said dismissively, “it’s probably gone to the vault.”

“The Vault?”

“The Vault... come on, I’m done here, I’ll take you to where I live and explain on the way.”





“... and the Vault is where they take the most valuable items?” asked Felix, trying to get his head around the vague description Took had given him.

“Well, not the items, the items aren’t really what’s valuable, it’s the essence that’s valuable,” Took struggled to find the gestures to convey the complex internal workings of his world.

“You’ve used that word before, essence. Is it like a kind of **magic**?”

“Hmm, sort of,” Took sighed, exasperated and frustrated but tried again, “every living thing, by the act of being alive, creates an *energy*, okay?”

“Alright.”

“No, that’s not right, it’s more of a feeling, a life force, an... essence. Adults tend to not really have any, unless you’re *really* special. Ever heard of, what’s his name, smells funny.”

“Smells funny?”

“Like, a lolly.”

“Smells like a lolly?”

“Musk sticks.”

“Musk sticks?”

“Long Musk maybe?”

“Elon Musk?”

“Yeah that guy, I see him around sometimes... pfft, putting a car into space... he’ll do anything to stop *us* getting his essence,” Took’s hands made circles for the planet and waved about for *space*.

“What do you mean by, us?”

“Oh, um, yeah, the Takers.”

“Takers... your name is Took, and you’re a taker?”

“Capital ‘T’ Taker, thank you very much, describes both my people, and our profession. No one’s better at nicking things than the Takers.”

“So that would make me better?”

“How do you mean?”

“Well, I *took* you.”

“You nev...”

“I caught you,” Felix smirked as Took awkwardly paused.

“Well.... ahhh, yeah you’re right... how did you do that anyway? You humans can’t normally see us, let alone catch us.”

“No idea, I think I’ve been seeing you for a while... That was you in the hen house this morning?”

“That was purely transactional, eggs for spears, simple,” extravagant hand gestures accompanied this explanation from Took.

“And in the long grass near the veggie patch?”

“Me as well.”

“And the shade house?”

“What?” Took stopped walking, turned and looked straight at Felix.

“In the shade house, you were in there moving around?”

“...no, not me,” Took shook his head uncomfortably, “let’s keep walking, we’re almost home.”

“Right... so, this essence stuff, adults are no good?”

“No, well, *much* less useful.”

“Less useful than what?”

“Than kids, once you humans turn, ohhhh thirteen, you kind of just *lose* all your essence, well, expect for...”

“Lolly guy, right,” Felix interrupted, paused, and asked his next question somewhat sombrelly “but, umm, Hazel and I turn thirteen tomorrow.”

“You sure do.”

“What does that mean?”

“You’ll lose your essence.”

Felix walked on for a moment in silence, reluctant to ask his next question because, in his heart, he feared he already knew the answer, “can someone lose their essence before they’re thirteen?”

“Ohhh, sure, you tend to always keep a bit, but thirteen is kind of the cut off, any time until then though, it just depends on who you are.”

“So Hazel...” Felix left the two words hanging in the air for a moment.

“Oh she lost most of her essence ages ago, sitting on that phone of hers all day, I remember when she used to play outside, run around, couldn’t get her to stop, full of essence she was...” Took continued on for some time describing all of the times Hazel and Felix had had fun together at their grandparents farm.

“You remember that one time a few summers ago when Daisy...” Took stopped, seeing the look at Felix’s face, “oh, hey, it’s all okay.”

“No, it’s not,” Felix whispered, “my twin sister has lost all her essence and tomorrow I’ll lose mine.”

“Well, it’s just a part of life really isn’t it,” Took replied nonchalantly, “nothing to get upset about.”

Took kept walking, the ground starting to incline towards a cliff face. Felix stared ahead and realised this wasn’t any ordinary rock face.



“What is all that stuff?”

“It’s our home.”

“You mean, the holes in the wall?”

“Yeah, nothing like a cosy little hole to curl up in surrounded by what you love.”

“You mean, the buttons, and keys, and, is that a diamond ring?”

“One of my favourites that is,” Took grinned at Felix, “but more than that, this is where the Takers live, our little **community**.”

Felix squinted and started to make out little green-shaded faces in the holes ahead, hands waving at Took and arms flailing about towards Felix.

“He’s with me!” Took shouted back towards the holes, “my guest.”

“Is that okay? Felix asked.

“Of course it is, I got you into this mess, the least I can do is give you somewhere to sleep for tonight.”

“You didn’t really, I found you, I grabbed you.”

“Well, yeah, sure, but, um, well.”

“Spit it out,” Felix growled, frustrated with Took’s care-free approach to Felix’s unenviable thirteenth birthday.

“The shoelace,” Took said flatly.

“Hazel’s rainbow shoelace?”

“Yes,” Took poked at the ground with his toe, not meeting Felix’s gaze.

“You *took* the shoelace?” Felix’s voiced was getting angrier with each word.

“Yes,” Took whispered back.

“You know what?” Felix replied, too calmly for Took’s liking.

“What?”

“Then *you* can help me get it back,” Felix said, jabbing his finger at Took.

“Can’t be done kiddo, firstly, it’s in the Vault, secondly, it won’t help your sister.”

“CAN’T BE DONE,” an echoing series of voices said in Felix’s mind.

“Ahhh, the **community** speaks,” Took grinned at Felix, “here, we all mime as one.”

“ALL MIME AS ONE,” the **community** of Takers made the same gestures with military precision.

“You’re telling me, with all of you,” Felix looked around at the hundreds of Takers poking their heads out of the holes, “we can’t *take* the shoelace from the Vault, that you won’t even try.”

“WON’T EVEN TRY,” the assembly gestured together.

Felix brought himself up to his full height and addressed the crowd of Takers before him, “where I come, from a **community**, a family, works together, to help each other. Even if we can’t win, we should still try!”

“STILL TRY,” the Takers replied.

“You’ll try?” Felix questioned, hopefully.

“**COMMUNITY WILL TRY,**” the Takers replied, their arms raised in a cheer.

Took led Felix to his own private hole and, after the countless events of the day, and with the hope that all will be right with the world tomorrow, fell into a deep sleep.



Felix awoke the next morning having slept soundly after the hopefulness of the previous day, “Took!” he shouted, no reply, “Took?” uncertainty creeping into his voice as he walked over to the little table in Took’s house. A small piece of paper sat atop, with only two words written in barely legible scrawl, clearly Took had not learnt to write.

TOOK GONE

Felix felt his stomach drop, the hope of the previous day, the thought that he could get his sister back, that he had friends that he could rely on, all fell away and a sombre mood overtook him. Angrily he scrunched the paper into a ball and tossed it into the corner of the house.

“I’m not giving up on my family, even without help, I still have to try,” he defiantly said to himself as he pulled on his boots and slipped his arms into his army jacket, and wrapped the cloak over his shoulders, standing and heading back towards the marketplace to find the koala and his sister’s shoelace.

The distant lights of the marketplace grew brighter as he determinedly walked up to the wombat, sliding his jacket off and flinging it towards him, “that should do,” he stated and walked straight past before the wombat even knew what was happening. Yesterday’s crowd of inquisitive and problematic sellers and buyers offered him no resistance today, his resolute state of mind driving him onward, defying anyone to get in his way. He came to the field in front of the building he saw the koala enter yesterday and didn’t hesitate, stomping over the purple flowers, crushing them beneath his feet. Not wanting to lose his momentum he walked straight up to the only visible door and knocked loudly. Footsteps hurriedly came from the other side and a series of locks were turned and bolts slid back, and a familiar grey and white furred face peaked its head around the door.

“Where’s the shoelace?!” Felix demanded.

“Who do you think you are com....”

“WHERE’S THE SHOELACE?!” Felix interrupted the koala loudly.

“Ahh, umm, that’s in the Vault.”

“And *where* is the Vault?”

Chuckling the koala answered, “that’s right behind me mate, but you’ll never get past me.”

Felix stopped for a moment and pondered his next move. “Do you like magic?” he asked, raising his eyebrows in a *knowing* way.

“There’s no such thing as magic.”

Felix reached into his pocket and pulled out a pack of playing cards, fanning them out in front of the koala.

“Oh that’s not magic, that’s just a trick, sleight of hand mate, I’ve seen it before,” the koala replied, proud of himself for spotting a ruse when he saw one.

“That,” Felix paused, a little taken back, “is very true.” Felix threw the cards at the koala’s face surprising both of them and darted past. Turning, and with all the strength he could muster, he shoved the koala from behind who, already unsteady on his feet from the cards, fell forward out through the door. Felix hastily slammed the door shut, locking and bolting it while the koala hammered on it from outside. Felix looked around, knowing the door wouldn’t hold for long and saw a bucket nearby.

“I wonder,” he said to himself as he picked up the bucket, waved his hand over the top and reached inside. Feeling something, he pulled and, despite the obvious size of the bucket, out came Matilda! Not his Grandma’s little Matilda, but the large, spear-wielding, rabbit-ear-wearing Matilda he met yesterday.

“Bah-gawk! What on earth is going on?!” Matilda clucked wildly.

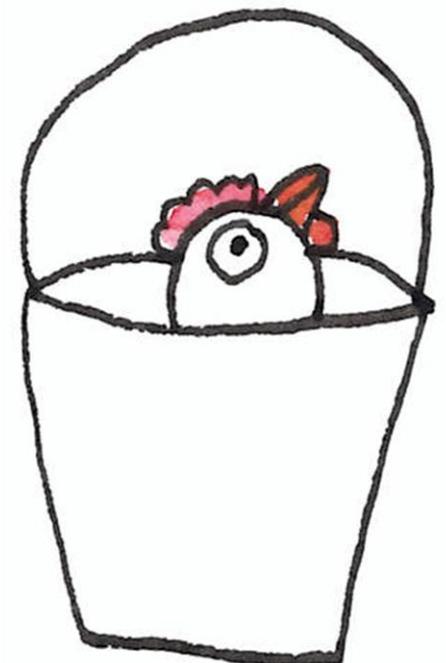
Felix explained the situation to her, that he knew Hazel’s shoelace was here, and he tricked the guard, and now he has to find the Vault and he’s not leaving without the shoelace!

“Well, *bu-cawww*, that all makes sense, but, how did you know the bucket trick would work?” Matilda asked, still a little unsure of what was going on.

“I didn’t, but it was worth a shot,” Felix shrugged a reply.

“Well alright then, what can I do to help?”

“Can you keep the koala from getting in?”



“You *bah-gaaawwwwww* got it”

Felix left Matilda by the door as he ran further into the building, the plant life that he had seen only from outside yesterday was much thicker inside and he stopped, suddenly seeing something out of the corner of his eye.

“Took?” he questioned, hopefully.

Without notice, something *smashed* down in front of him, breaking the ground and causing Felix to stumble and fall. He looked and saw a large branch laying on the ground in front of him. *Did someone chop some of the tree down?* He thought to himself, but as he did, the branch moved lifting up once again before rushing towards him.

Keep a low profile.

A small voice in the back of his mind prompted him, and Felix ducked and rolled as the branch flew over his head.

A huge and ominous voice boomed through the building, “how dare you enter my domain!”

“Who, what, are you?!” Felix shouted back, looking for something to direct his yelling towards.

“I am the Vault!” it furiously yelled back.

“But *what* are you?” Felix still couldn’t see anyone up in the tree.

“This is what I am!” came the reply followed closely by two more branches narrowly missing Felix and he jumped and ducked out of the way.

“You’re a tree?!” he replied, terrified at the realisation.

“I am so much more than a tree! When I first came to this place, there was nothing but pitiful growth, now I have taken over and I rule all! My subjects feed me with the essence of your world and that sustains me and let’s me grow!” the Vault roared in evil joy.

“Give me back my sister’s shoelace!” Felix shouted defiantly.

“Oh no, no, no, no... that’s mine now, your sister’s shoelace was oh-so-tasty, and extra special, because it was the very last morsel... now that she’s thirteen, it’s all gone.”

Taken aback, Felix shouted, but less forcefully, “you’re wrong, I know my sister, she’s still in there somewhere!”

A branch slammed down nearby, Lantana flowers falling through the sky behind it and as Felix looked upwards, he thought *this would be quiet pretty, if it weren’t for a giant carnivorous hybrid plant trying to kill me.*

From behind him Felix heard the frantic shouts of Matilda, “Felix! *Bah-Gawww!* I can’t hold this door much longer, whatever your plan is, best be getting to it!”

A plan? Felix thought, *I don’t have a plan. Took’s abandoned me, I’ve turned thirteen and lost my essence, even with the shoelace, Hazel is in the same situation as me... What’s the point?*

A branch swooped down, tendrils outstretched and grabbed Felix as he stood in a stunned and sombre state.

“And now, I think I shall consume what little essence there’s left of you too, I’ve never eaten a whole, living, being of essence before... but I’m always willing to try new things,” the Vault cackled in anticipation of the feast ahead. It opened its gaping maw, vines lashing out left and right, sap like saliva pouring from the open crevice, thorn like teeth ready to bite and eviscerate Felix.

“**COMMUNITY WILL TRY,**” a *booming* cacophony of voices echoed throughout the building as the **community** of hundreds, no, thousands of Takers poured in through every little opening.

chapter seven HOME AGAIN



“Good morning my old dears. Time to stretch your legs. It’s another beautiful morning, here in our little bit of paradise.” Grandma opened the chook shed and let her feathered friends out. Ethel, Gretel, Beryl and Gertie trundled down the ramp with their usual abandon.

“Where’s Matilda, girls?” Grandma asked with a look of concern spreading across her face. Matilda was the head hen, after all, so it was unusual for her to not be strutting out first. After a few seconds more, Matilda appeared at the top of the ramp.

“Ooh, have you hurt yourself, love?! That’s not good. I hope you’ve not been bossing the other hens around too much.” Grandma said, as she watched Matilda slowly began to limp her way down the ramp. Grandma shuffled over to collect the eggs, she removed her glasses and rubbed at her eyes. She thought for a moment she saw a little bandage beneath Matilda’s wing. The thought soon dissipated from her mind as she picked up the seven eggs, placing them one by one into her basket. The plastic egg, that she’d had since she was a wee girl herself, was there as always. She picked it up to dust off the residue of the chook pen and was taken aback by an odd rattling sound within it. Perplexed, she shook it again to her ear and then slowly separated its two halves. Her mouth dropped open. Her eyes widened. A small tremor spread through her hands. Inside the egg was the little ballerina from her music box. She had lost the ballerina when she was seven years old.

Flashes of memories, Hazel had not thought of for what seemed an age, came flooding into her dreams. A strange sensation started to creep in from her extremities. Her toes and fingertips tingled. Oddly aware of the top of her head and even the ends of the strands of her red hair. The feeling grew and moved along her body with increasing speed and power, culminating at her centre. Her mind racing, aware of every cell of her physical, emotional, intellectual being, building to a crescendo of brilliant white light. Then silence. A warm glow of acceptance. This feeling she could not have identified a moment before, was peace.

Hazel awoke with a gasp. A gentle shiver ran down her spine. Not the kind where you feel like someone is walking over a grave, more like a butterfly shuffling off its chrysalis as it emerges. She heard music coming from the kitchen. A tune so sweet and familiar that she felt drawn to it. Slipping on her fluffy bathrobe and slippers she went in search of the melody. Grandma was sitting at the kitchen table looking down in wonder at the item in her hands.

“Good morning, Grandma.” Hazel whispered as she wrapped her arms around her Grandma’s shoulders in a warm hug. “What have you got there?”

Oddly unsurprised by Hazel’s affection, Grandma quietly replied, “It’s my music box that my mother gave me as a child. It stopped working long ago. We thought it was broken. I don’t know how it can be, my love, but I found my little ballerina in the chook shed this morning. Inside the little plastic egg. The music box is working again. I just don’t how it can be.”

Hazel squeezed her Grandma’s shoulders and said, “Anything is possible, Grandma. Let’s show Felix. Is he even up yet?”

Grandma and Hazel went down the passageway to Felix’s room. The door was slightly ajar but no sound was coming from within. Something didn’t feel quite right and they both rubbed their arms as goosebumps tickled their skin.

“Felix, wake up, you sleepy head. You’ll never believe what Grandma has found!” Hazel pushed open the door and stopped in her tracks. Grandma softly gasped as she peered into the room. Felix laid on the bed, eyes closed. He was covered by a blanket but no movement could be perceived. The air between the girls and the bed shimmered as though a mirage, tiny crackles of energy buzzed in their ears. The haziness subsided and beside the bed there appeared to be a large pile of stuff. Toothbrushes, buttons, keys, socks, shoes, laptop charges, dummies, little baby blankets, backs of earrings, sunglasses, hair ties. If you can name any item that you’ve lost in your life, you can be sure something of that ilk was in that pile. Tears began to well in Hazel’s eyes as she realised that all may not be well with her brother.

“Felix! Wake up! Felix!!” Hazel exclaimed as she attempted to traverse the pile to reach him. Their Grandma watched on, clutching her music box in her hands, the sweet music filled the room.

“What happened to Took?” Felix feebly mumbled as his eyes started to twitch open. Hazel reached his side and plonked herself on the edge of the bed, her feet resting on something metallic and hard nestled in the heap of items.

Overcome with joy that Felix seemed to be okay, Hazel asked him in a teasing voice, “Who’s Took and where did all this stuff come from?”

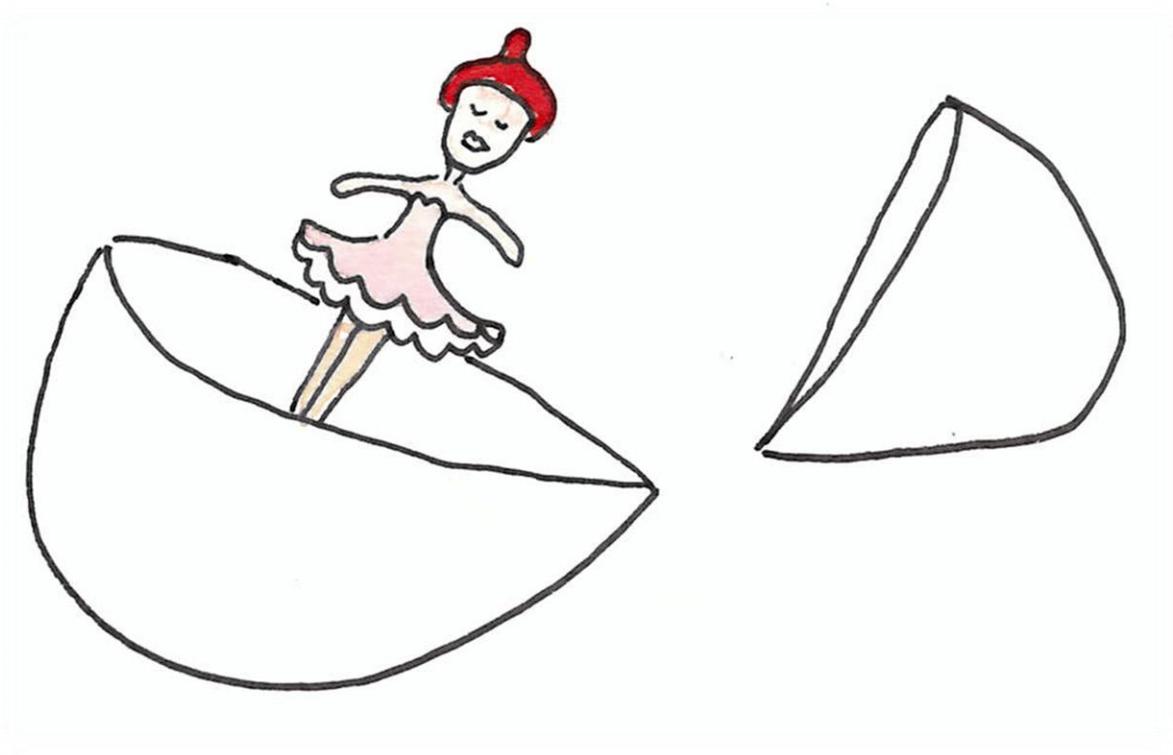
Felix propped himself up on his shoulders and took in his surroundings.

“They did it!” he said. “The Takers saved us.”

Before more could be said, they heard the laundry door slide open and muffled excited conversation.

“Happy birthday kids! We’re here for the holidays!” Hazel and Felix’s parents happy faces appeared in the doorway.

At that moment, Grandad waltzed in and remarked, “You’ll never guess what kids, I finally got rid of that ruddy weed.” He paused, observing the scene before him. They were here. All together, and happy. Not in the slightest bit perturbed by the random pile of items in Felix’s room, Grandad then turned to the twins’ parents and knowingly said, “glad you could join us. It’s been too long.”



Fin.



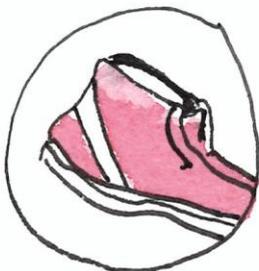
When Felix and his twin sister, Hazel arrive at their Grandparent's farm for the holidays, nothing feels the same. Hazel is so boring, distant and grumpy. Felix wonders how they could be related, let alone twins!

But there are MYSTERIES to solve, so there's no time to be glum... when strange things start going missing, it's the beginning of an adventure.

- Will Felix ace his magic trick?
- Can you really meet a poltergeist?
- How dependable are hens? and...
- What is the real value of a button?



You'll have to read on and see...



This is a fun read
for 10-16 year olds
(and anyone young at heart!)

