

THE WISHING STONE

KEEPER OF
THE STONE

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PROLOGUE



Lost and Found

Did the man survive?"
"No sir, he was dead when we arrived," Officer Winton said. "Went right through the front window and into the tree."

Detective Johnson took in a long deep breath. The smell of fresh-cut grass and the cold air might have combined to make a rather brisk and pleasant evening, if it wasn't for the acrid scent of scorched rubber, gas and burning oil that mixed with it. No matter how many times he saw this kind of tragedy it never got any easier. He exhaled sharply, his breath rising into the cold, wet air.

Detective Johnson pulled his jacket tight. He rubbed his hands together, and thrust them into his pockets. "They said he was drinking?"

"With all the open beer cans in the car, he could've

been drunk," Officer Winton said above the clatter of radios and the shouts of officers clearing the area of gathering onlookers.

"Any prior DUI's?"

"Nothing ... I saw this guy pretty regularly on my night beat. Name's Stan ... drifter, bit of a loner. Never the kind of guy who'd go around stealing cars, though. I've never even seen him in a car; it doesn't make sense."

"These things never do," Detective Johnson said. He looked over at the car which was wrapped around one of the larger trees in the park, smoke and steam still pouring into the air. Several feet beyond the car lay two lifeless forms covered by black tarps.

"He also killed some pedestrians—a young couple with a stroller." Officer Winton's eyes glistened in the flickering light, and he lowered his voice. "They were in pretty bad shape," he said, trying to gain his composure.

An uncomfortable silence compelled Detective Johnson to offer some bit of comfort. He clapped his hand on officer Winton's shoulder.

Officer Winton cleared his throat. "Looks like their baby was the only survivor." He motioned to a fellow officer standing next to a stroller and rocking the now sleeping baby girl in her arms. "Someone must've been looking out for her ... car barely missed the stroller."

Detective Johnson's fist clenched; his lips tightened together. All he could do was shake his head. "Have the baby's relatives been notified?" he said.

"I'm afraid not, sir, we couldn't find any identification

on the couple. We have our forensics team searching for anything that could tell us who they are, but so far nothing's turned up. We did find this however..." he said, motioning for Detective Johnson to follow. Officer Winton's rubber-gloved hand lifted up the golden pendant that lay around the sleeping infant's delicate neck.

"This is little Stephanie," he said, pointing out the inscription. "but on the front ... well I've never seen symbols like this before."

The flickering shadows cast by the movement of red and blue patrol lights made it hard to see much of anything. Detective Johnson bent close to the sleeping child to get a better look at the symbols on the pendant.

"Is it Chinese?"

"Not according to Officer Chen; says it's not anything he's familiar with. But we made a rubbing of the symbols and our language experts are working on it. Hopefully we'll know something soon."

"Good. The sooner we can get this child back to her family the better. It's bad enough she will never know her parents." He allowed himself one last look at the lifeless forms beyond the steaming wreckage, and shook his head once again as he turned his back on the scene.

"Well, keep me informed," he said.

"Yes sir, I have you on speed dial."

CHAPTER ONE



The Why

A cold shiver ran down Stephanie's spine as she awoke, startled to find herself staring into the blackness of the cellar. The beam of a patrol car from her dream still forced its way into her peripheral vision—or was it just the sliver of light that crawled under the door of the cellar at her back?

The familiar wet green smell assaulted her nostrils once again, and her immediate surroundings came into dark focus. She didn't know how she'd let herself doze off on the top step of the cellar; she was always too scared to let that happen. But it did happen, and faster than she could control.

She couldn't remember when she first started having this ultra-realistic nightmare, but combining it with the one part of the grand stone house Stephanie hated wasn't exactly fun.

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It seemed like she'd had this dream for at least the last two or three years: maybe about the time she started living with the Bentleys. She was probably already eleven by now; she didn't actually know her real birthday. She had this dream so many times that she could remember the details, even when she was awake. It felt like some kind of weird connection to the parents she'd never known.

The cellar was the usual punishment she could expect if she didn't do things according to the demands of the Bentleys.

Myrtle makes a big deal out of everything. I was almost done polishing the banisters. What's wrong with an extra ten minutes, anyway? Stephanie lifted her hand into the dim beam of light that crept under the door. *And if it's not her, it's Charles.*

With nothing to do but wait, she felt for her pendant, as she often did when lost in thought. But there was no chain to twist around her fingers.

Where is it? Where's my necklace?

Stephanie stood so quickly she nearly lost her balance in the dark.

Did it break off? She quickly dropped to the stairs and ran her hands frantically along the rough wooden surfaces making her way down toward the bottom. Tears were forming in the corners of her eyes as she descended slowly feeling along the steps between the thick stone walls at either side. This necklace was the only bit of her parents she had left and she didn't want to lose it.

She breathed in deeply attempting to calm herself, but instead choked and coughed on the smell of mildew. Her

hands continued sweeping each step, but as she made it to the bottom step, the pendant was nowhere to be found. She knelt in the cold dark, defeated. She bowed over and buried her face in her hands—the warmth of her tears washing over her. There was no way she was going to find it here in the dark.

Why am I even down here? The question lingered in her mind.

It took awhile for her to calm herself, but slowly Stephanie began to realize that maybe this punishment wasn't as random as she thought. Mrs. Vanden, the case worker in charge of her adoption to the Bentleys, was probably due for a visit any day now, and the Bentleys had a tendency to use punishments to get her to cooperate. Then Mrs. Vanden would believe that things were going well.

She sat up again sniffing through her plugged nose and wiping her face against her sleeves. At the top of the stairs she could still see the tiny beam of light marked by a steady stream of marching dust.

Is it that time again?

A faint smile sparkled across her tear-stained face momentarily. Mrs. Vanden was always so bubbly; the kind of person that put you at ease right away, the same worker Stephanie had from the beginning. She was probably the only person Stephanie really trusted now. But then, even she'd been deceived by the Bentleys.

Stephanie was probably about eight when they took her from the orphanage. Before that time, the Bentleys had been so kind: they took her on outings, went shopping,

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watched movies together, and it seemed to her they enjoyed spending time with her. So, when they told her she was going to officially be part of the family she was elated.

But it wasn't like that now. Everything changed so dramatically after the Bentleys got legal guardianship. The adoption still wasn't complete.

"I thought they cared... Stupid, stupid, stupid," she whispered, pounding the words into her forehead with her fist.

First life had stolen her parents from her and now any hope of happiness as well. She was being forced to grow up way too soon.

Would she ever trust anyone like that again? Tears were swimming back into view. Her barely-audible voice cracked, "Never again."

Stephanie realized for the first time where the search for her necklace had brought her. She didn't like the dark at the bottom of the steps. She felt uneasy like some black spider was crawling toward her unseen, or worse, some dark thing was watching; waiting for her to get too close. Quickly she clambered her way back to the top step, and sat next to the light.

If Mrs. Vanden only knew what Stephanie's life was really like...

Of course, the Bentleys would never allow that to happen. They weren't about to give up their most important investment. Charles had said it was worth the time and money they'd put into training Stephanie to do things just the way they liked. Stephanie didn't really know anything about investing, but she had a feeling Charles'

method wasn't quite right.

Once, Stephanie had even tried to expose the Bentleys, but they expertly made it seem as though she was just throwing a temper tantrum. Punishment was quick and severe.

Ever since then, they always found ways to threaten or take something dear to her so she would cooperate.

Stephanie suddenly realized where her necklace was.

Myrtle has it! She must've grabbed it when she dragged me here. I should've paid more attention.

She pounded her fists on the wood step with a hollow thud.

So this was just a lousy excuse for her to get my necklace. She hated the thought of Myrtle's pudgy fingers groping her necklace. She'd had the necklace since she was a baby. It was the only link she had to finding out who she was, and the one thing she'd been able to keep from Myrtle and Charles—the one thing they hadn't taken. Until now.

She felt her disgust for them rise from the darkness of her stomach. She stood stiff: ready to pound, scream, whatever she had to do. But the sound of footsteps was nearing the door and Stephanie backed wisely down a couple of steps.

The door flung wide, a flood of light temporarily overcoming her. Charles' and Myrtle's massive silhouettes stood blocking the doorway, one tall and wide the other short and wider, her dress hung loosely like drapes and her wiry curly hair stood up as though she'd been electrocuted.

"You will put this on," Myrtle said. She was holding

out a neatly pressed dress wrapped in plastic with a *J&J's Rentals, Inc.* sticker on front. Stephanie stepped back up to the top stair and timidly reached out for the dress. "Your social worker will be here any minute and we don't want her to see what a sloppy girl you really are."

Myrtle grabbed her by the shirt and pulled her out of the cellar, bringing her in close. "This is her last visit, and you will be on your best behavior. And in case you get any bright ideas I will be holding onto *this* for the next couple of weeks; just in case," she said, adding a quick chuckle and dangling the necklace over Stephanie's head. Stephanie instinctively dropped the dress and grabbed for it but Myrtle pulled it away before she could touch it.

"Give it back! You have no right!" she said, still clawing for her necklace. Charles moved in and it was all over. He had to bend down from his impressive height to bring his pale face and bushy eyebrows level with Stephanie's.

"Careful, or you might never get it back." He stuffed the dress back into her slender arms, nearly knocking her to the ground. "The last thing we need is a spoiled little girl. Just behave, and you'll get it back without a scratch."

Stephanie longed to touch the necklace still dangling from Myrtle's hand.

Stephanie would do just about anything to keep her necklace from harm, even if it meant pretending to be a happy family.

There was only one other time Stephanie had been without her necklace that she could remember. It was back in the orphanage. Stephanie was always looking for answers. She asked everyone she could about the necklace's

symbols. She pestered so many people and spoke of it so often that Sister Maria finally confiscated it from her.

"It's too much of a distraction," she said. Stephanie had to beg, and swear not to speak of it again before Sister Maria finally consented to returning it.

This necklace was the only object that might be able to help her find out about her parents.



"It's not fair," her voice pierced the stillness of her attic room.

Her blue eyes glistened as she lay under the bright sparkling stars shining through the only window in the attic. The stars were quite beautiful. If it weren't that she was in such a foul mood she might have even found them peaceful.

Why couldn't she have made Mrs. Vanden understand? It had been four long weeks before Myrtle finally consented to return her necklace. Stephanie had done exactly what Myrtle and Charles wanted, and it made her sick.

She turned over and slammed her fist into her pillow, then buried her face in it. Things would be much different if her parents were alive. Anything would be better than living with the Bentleys.

She slowly turned around to gaze up at the stars once more. Her fingers absently tracing the cold metal loops of the pendant which formed its triangular shape and the odd symbols deeply etched into its center.

THE WHY

She brushed a gold lock of hair from her face as her eyes moved down to focus on the strange writing for what seemed like the millionth time. The deep grooves were partially filled with what looked like jade. *Someone must know what this means. But how will I ever find anyone when I'm locked in the Bentleys' house?*

She closed her eyes and held the pendent tight to her chest. She was just drifting off to sleep.

Someday I'll find a way out.

CHAPTER TWO



Secret Discoveries

Myrrtle greedily stuffed another chocolate into her mouth, and then another.

“Where is that box of chocolates?” Her eyes were glued to her favorite food show.

Stephanie had just finished cleaning up the breakfast meal. She ran through the dining nook and nearly tripped as she turned into the room where Myrtle sat. Stephanie placed the fancy box on the end table next to Myrtle’s puffy easy chair just as she finished off her last piece.

“It’s about time. What were you doing, sleeping? Why do we even keep you around, you good-for-nothing girl?”

Charles added a small, but audible chuckle from his corner of the room. The half-balding top of his grayish sand-colored head bobbed up and down over the back of his orange easy chair as he continued typing away at his lap-top. He worked as some kind of consultant to a large

computer company. Stephanie didn't really know what he did; only that it gave him large amounts of money for very little work.

Stephanie stepped back. "... but I was just finishing up the dish—"

"I guess I haven't given you enough to do," Myrtle cut in. "But I think I can solve that problem right now." A big smirk crossed Myrtle's face causing the large mole on her plump cheek to get dangerously close to her beady eye. Myrtle had found the perfect excuse to give her even more work.

Stephanie's muscles tightened. This wasn't fair.

Myrtle pulled an already-made list from the end table drawer and held it in front of Stephanie's face. "Make sure everything is completed before the end of the day."

Stephanie took the large list and looked it over, allowing herself a small sigh. Myrtle turned from her show with a look of disgust.

"You just remember, you'd still be at that awful orphanage if it weren't for us, now get moving," she said. "And get this out of here." Myrtle thrust two empty chocolate boxes into Stephanie's arms and her smirk resurfaced.

I'd definitely be happier at the orphanage.

She remembered plenty of cleaning there too, but she didn't mind because there was also time to play, or sit and talk with her friends. *Friends: where are they now that I need them?* But Cathy, her self-proclaimed rival at the orphanage had turned most of them against her, anyway. Only Chelsea had dared to side with Stephanie. *I wish I*

could see Chelsea again. She longed just to have someone—anyone. But school was one of the first things to go after the Bentleys got custody.

Why did they even bother to bring me here?

Stephanie's lips pursed tightly together and her teeth clenched. The edge of Myrtle's list crumpled in Stephanie's fist and she nearly spiked the empty chocolate boxes into the kitchen waste basket.

I've got to get out of here some day.



The annoying smirking-cat clock looked down from its perch on the wall of the main bathroom where Stephanie had decided to start. *The Bentleys' stuff ... yuck.*

She stood for a moment surveying the grandeur of the room. The only benefit of living with the Bentleys was their rich old house. Stephanie was fascinated with it.

From the street, the house was a fine and stately manor that rose above a high stone wall topped with fancy iron flourishes. Tall gnarled trees and ivy obscured the structure in parts: as though they were trying to hide some secret. It really was a beautiful home, despite its age and the Bentleys clearly felt that its dignity would lend them an air of importance.

Stephanie polished the ornate solid brass framework around the tall mirror that must have hung on the wall of the main bathroom for ages; she was getting the easy tasks on Myrtle's list done first. She leaned, her hand resting

on the heavy frame, as she admired the reflection of the beautifully finished marble floors she had just mopped.
Not bad, if I do say so, my—

But just then Stephanie's hand slipped to one side of the mirror. Her heart jumped into her throat as the mirror's image shifted. The mirror was coming off the wall, one side of its bulky frame swung slowly forward.

Stephanie leaped aside, clenching her teeth and closing her eyes; bracing for the impact that was sure to bring down huge punishment.

After a few moments with no sound, Stephanie's shoulders relaxed as she turned back to peek at the mirror.

The mirror hadn't fallen. One edge of the frame was still clinging to the wall—almost like ...

A door? She stepped forward and cracked the opening a bit farther, cautiously poking her head into the darkened space and looked back through the mirror which was now a window into the bathroom.

"What could this have been used for?" she said in a whisper. She let the mirror swing open. The space was large enough to fit one normal sized man.

Had this been some sort of hiding place; a refuge from intruders? *Why would anyone put this here?* Stephanie examined the small compartment.

Maybe it's just a storage space.

Her rubber-gloved hand cautiously probed the back wall a few feet in. Looking toward the floor she noticed a sliver of light that seemed to faintly define a rectangular hatch on the wall next to her feet.

What's this?

Did this hiding place go even farther in? Where could it lead?

She stooped down and looked back over her shoulder, making sure there were no Bentleys to spot her. She pushed carefully on the panel, and it opened without a sound. She peered through the opening at the silhouettes of several metal cylinders lighted from behind by two rectangular-shaped outlines of light that looked like the inside of cabinet doors.

She had stuffed her gloves into the waistband of her baggy trousers and was now feeling the top rim and two protruding handles of the large soup pot closest to her.

She scooted the pot quietly to one side, and crouched between two large pots. She must have been under one of the large granite countertops in the kitchen.

But wouldn't the mirror have to be on the opposite wall of the bathroom to lead to the kitchen? It was just too far away.

This is definitely the kitchen, but how?

With the Bentleys' appetite for fine foods, Stephanie could never be sure when they might be in the kitchen. So she inched the cabinet door open until it came to a sudden halt.

"What the ...," Charles voice said. The door to the cabinet flung open and a large hand grabbed Stephanie by the collar, and yanked her out; pots and pans clanging loudly as she plowed painfully through them.

"What's this? Myrtle you better get in here!" he yelled. He turned to face Stephanie. "What were you doing in there? ... Speak up." He shook her briskly.

Stephanie didn't quite know what to say; she really hadn't intended to be under the counter in the kitchen.

"I ... I'm not sure," she said.

"What do you mean, you're not sure? I'll give you just three seconds to tell me why you were really down there, before I decide to take a paddle to your back side." He opened a drawer with his free hand and pulled out a long metal spoon. "One ... Two ... Thr—"

"Okay, okay," she said in desperation. "I ... I wasn't sure, but I thought I heard some ... some mice?" It was the best she could conjure with Charles' metal spoon hanging over her.

"Mice? Oh great! You'd better be telling the truth; I think you know what'll happen if I find out differently." He let go of her collar and smacked the spoon into his open palm several times for emphasis.

This was the first time Charles had really ever threatened her with physical harm perhaps this was due to the fact that there would no longer be social workers coming around. No doubt Charles would have made good on his threat, and it made her feel uneasy.

"You'd better get back to work; Myrtle's not going to be happy about this." Stephanie backed away then ran for the door. She had to get back to the mirror before anyone else noticed it.

Stephanie's heart was positively fluttering as she ran back down the hall and entered the bathroom. She ran to the mirror and the small hatch that still hung open. Stephanie quickly closed the small panel—a little too quickly. It bumped one of the pots.

“Oh great, we do have mice,” Charles said. His footsteps were approaching the cabinet doors.

Next came Myrtle’s screechy voice. “What do you keep yelling about?”

But Stephanie was now closing the mirror back into place. She leaned on the free-standing sink next to the mirror and took a deep breath, her heart still pumping fast.

That was way too close.

Sure, it was a cool passageway that might come in useful, but she definitely didn’t want a repeat of this experience.

Definitely not a place to hide.

Stephanie breathed in deeply, her hand on her chest as the hard thumping slowly dissipated. She thought it best to be moving on to her other tasks if she expected to be done with Myrtle’s chore list by the end of the day.

I’d better not stick around here, anyway.

“Okay let’s see,” she said. She had grabbed Myrtle’s wrinkled list of chores from off the sink, her finger moving down the page. “I guess I should do the attic next.” Her finger had stopped on one of the items on the list. It jumped out more than the others because the letters had been traced several times in a messy fashion.

She quickly folded up the list and stuffed it into her pocket, then headed up the long spiral staircase. The stairs always seemed to go on forever.

As she entered the third floor attic room that had been hers for nearly two years, Stephanie retrieved the folded-up chore list from her pocket and read the messy handwriting once again:

Organize and LIST all items in the attic
ESPECIALLY ALONG THE NORTH WALL

Stephanie looked past her neatly made bed near the center of the room to the jumble of items stacked and scattered along the rounded stone walls on the opposite side of the room. The attic always reminded her of the upper-most room of a castle tower. It was clearly the most cluttered room in the entire house. Most of the things belonged to the Bentleys and were just little odds and ends they didn't use anymore. There were out-of-style clothes, a space heater that no longer worked, old jewelry boxes and a few items of old or damaged furniture they'd been unwilling, or too lazy to part with.

But along the back wall were still other things that had been left by the previous owner of the old house. Those things were veiled by a large dark tarp that draped over what looked like many square-cornered boxes or, perhaps, furniture.

She sighed heavily and looked up, her eyes following the high rafters that went, it seemed, in every direction to strengthen the roof. The rafters were lit by the attic's single small window.

I think it's time for a little fresh air. Stephanie wasn't going to let the longer-than-usual list keep her down. She pushed the double windows open, and breathed in a deep

breath of fresh flower-scented air as she looked south across the tops of the enormous oak trees that reached up through the ground like gnarled hands. Several had trunks that must have been more than a few feet in width. Many of these ancient trees decorated the manor's spacious grounds. Stephanie crossed her arms and leaned on the window sill; it came right up to her chest. She watched the light clouds lazily floating across the endless blue. She could stay this way forever—except that the breeze was a bit chilly.

At least it's always the right temperature in here. It doesn't matter if the weather's hot, or cold, or rainy: whatever.

Myrtle and Charles must not have noticed this little fact. She'd overheard them saying they'd chosen this room for her for only two reasons: first, it was the farthest room from them; and second, it was the room in which they estimated she would feel the least comfortable; they both seemed to agree that spoiled brats were not to be tolerated, after all.

Stephanie didn't really care for extremes in temperature—thank you very much—but she couldn't have picked a more comfortable room herself. And even though she'd lived here for more than a year, it still felt so mysterious and enchanting.

The sound of a passing car from beyond the gates brought her back into the attic.

I guess I'd better get started.

Stephanie glanced at the chore list still clutched absently in her hand as she walked back to her bed, then stuffed it back into her pocket..

Looks like she wants a list of whatever I find.

She ripped a sheet of paper from the notebook she kept on the little table next to her bed, and made her way to the side of the attic with the Bentleys' unused clutter. It was amazing just how much this room held; it must've been twenty feet or more around. But looking from outside, the turret that housed the spiral stairs and Stephanie's room looked less than half that size.

I think I'll start on this stuff.

Stephanie began by writing down an item then moving it next to the wall. Some of the boxes were quite heavy, but she made several orderly stacks. Though she worked quickly, it must have taken at least an hour before she managed to stack most of the Bentleys' things. Wiping the sweat from her brow, she looked over her neatly written inventory of items with a sense of satisfaction.

The light breeze from the window felt so good that Stephanie decided to take a well deserved break. She sat in an old rocking chair she'd found among the Bentleys' things. She closed her eyes and felt the smooth back and forth of the chair as she breathed deeply in and out. The stillness was only lightly seasoned with the distant sounds of birds beyond the window.

The sudden sound of fluttering and scratching above her head caused Stephanie's eyes to pop open and dart around the rafters.

"Oh no ... poor thing," Stephanie had noticed a bird.

It must've come through the window and doesn't know which way is out.

It was a small blue bird with a yellow underbelly and

wing tips. It seemed to be in a panic. Stephanie stood to get a better look.

"No ... no, giant thing, don't come any closer," the bird seemed to be saying in a sing-song way. Stephanie backed up and shook her head.

Okay, did that bird just do something other than chirping, or am I going insane?

"D...did you just speak to me?" Stephanie heard her own voice speak in a series of chirps and whistles.

"Oh no ... the giant thing can speak. Please don't hurt Drib." His voice quivered as though he were about to cry. His wings fluttered wildly and he bumped against the ceiling several times, as though trying to push his way through it.

Stephanie found herself backing away. Her head was spinning. "That's impossible; birds can't speak."

"Yes ... yes you go away giant thing; leave Drib alone." The bird perched on a rafter. It was still shaking with fear.

I am going crazy. It was the third time she had heard something other than chirping from the small bird. *All right, either I have a really good imagination or that bird is talking.* She took a step forward. "Do ... you need some help?" She waited to see if the bird would speak again.

"Please ... just leave Drib alone; he has done nothing to you." The frightened bird was backing farther into the rafters. He took flight and fluttered around the rafters in a futile attempt to find the opening he had come through, but he was much too frightened.

"I'm not going to hurt you. Do you need some help?"

The bird had found a rafter once again and was

panting hard, his beak held open. Then he began to sob. "Please ... Drib just wants to go home."

"Is that your name ... Drib? Don't worry, I'll show you the way out. It's just right over here." Stephanie had walked over to the window and was pointing her finger through it. But Drib didn't move. He sat high in the rafters sobbing and breathing quickly.

"Oh ... Drib is doomed to be eaten by giants. Why did Drib listen to Flusk." He buried his head behind his wing.

"Hey, I'm not going to eat you. Didn't you hear me? This is the way out. Look I'm even backing away so you can leave whenever you like."

Drib slowly poked his head out from under his wing. "You are trying to trick poor Drib," he sobbed. "I will try, then you will catch poor Drib before he can go." He placed his head back under his wing.

"Okay, now you're just being silly. You're so much faster than I am."

"Drib is pretty quick, sometimes," the bird said pulling his head up to look around again. Stephanie had backed up as far as the attic would allow.

"How'd you learn to talk? I mean, do you talk to people often?"

"Oh no, Drib stays away from nasty giants who try to hurt him. But Flusk dared him to do it. Should never have listened. Never. Drib never knew nasty giants could speak." He fluttered quickly down to the window sill nervously peering back toward Stephanie, as if to see what she would do, but she didn't move.

For a moment, Stephanie began to feel lonely.

“Maybe you could come back sometime if you’re not too scared; there’s really no one to talk to here.” With all her friends from the orphanage gone, the next best thing was Drib—even if he was just a bird.

Drib dashed out the window. “Maybe, Maybe!” he chirped back as he left.

She made her way back to the rocking chair and sat down, staring out the window. She didn’t know what to think. She rocked back and closed her eyes once again, exhaling air from her puffed out cheeks.

Talking to birds. *Was I actually using bird language?* No one would ever believe this. After a while she opened her eyes again. She began to wonder if her mind hadn’t just been playing tricks on her. Was it a dream? Perhaps she needed this break more than she’d thought.