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**Reality Upset**

Norella Triste was sick of summer already. You would think, living in such an immense and regal house, she would have plenty of new adventures to find and hidden rooms to explore. Her parents, however, underestimated her ability of discovery, and didn't believe that she already knew any secret the house had to offer. Too busy with their important affairs, they brushed her off when she complained of boredom and told her that any child would be lucky to live in such a mysteriously built house and to go explore the hidden treasures.

After eight years of exploring these "hidden" treasures, however, Norella needed something more.

"Why couldn't they have given me a brother or sister, or even a servant, to play with?" she wondered, as she stared longingly out her picture window to the hills and river beyond the property line. As she swept her eyes over the landscape, her eye was caught by something out of place, and her train of thought shifted to the possibilities of the little black shape. She spent hours like this, staring out at the land, and knew the dips and turns of the scene better than the freckles on her own body.

Her stomach began a riveted rendition of Swan Lake, twirling and jumping at the prospect of a new adventure. Her parents never allowed Norella to play outside. Whenever she inquired why this was, they did as they did best, and sent her away with a jumbled explanation and a command to go explore the intricacies of their home. Being naïve and still blindly loving her parents, Norella questioned nothing, though she had constant dreams of the mysteries beyond

the walls of her prison. Now she had a mysterious object in the distance pulling her interests outside these walls, and she knew that she needed to discover what was out there.

She pulled on her dainty black boots, with the little laces, threw on her favorite play dress, the color of lemon bars her grandmother always made, with a ribbon of white lace tied around her middle, and launched into her closet, feeling around the dark floor for the handle.

"My parents wouldn't have told me to explore as much if they wanted to keep me in this house," she thought merrily as she lowered herself onto the spiral staircase underneath the trapdoor. They must have known that she would find ways around their rules; they just didn't think of how much trouble it could lead to.

Norella ran down the staircase, since there was no need to be quiet. Mr. and Mrs. Triste may have built the house, but they were unaware of the designs; only Norella and the designer knew all of the twists and turns, and this thought gave Norella a sense of importance and power.

She reached the bottom of the staircase and slowly unlatched the small door in front of her. Light crept in through the crack, and Norella squinted through the suit jackets and scarves for any sight of her parents. She saw no one, and as it was around three o'clock, she assumed Mother was taking her afternoon nap and Father would be reading the paper in his study on the fourth floor.

She took a deep gulp of air, and rushed out of the stairwell and straight to the door ahead of her. She opened it with no caution, and felt the breeze of cool air rush into the hall. Stepping onto the threshold of the porch, she closed the door quietly before her, and marveled at the beauty of the outside world. It was such a change from the dormant atmosphere of the house. She made her way down the steps, and then broke into a run, towards the dip where she had seen the

figure. The wind ruffled her auburn hair, making it dance in the sunlight; twigs and dirt crackled underneath her untainted boots, and her tinkling laughter coated the air with a youthfulness that it hadn't held in years.

Upon reaching the spot on the river where the figure had been, Norella turned every which way, waiting for the mystery to unveil itself. Maybe it was an animal, or a plaything, or another person! To any typical child, this may have been a frightening situation, but with her sheltered upbringing and love for adventure, Norella had adrenaline rushing through her veins at the prospect of a new discovery. After a few minutes, however, she grew impatient and irritated, for she could not find a single thing out of place, and plopped down in the long grass in exasperation. The blades of grass tickled her arms, and seemed to invite her to lay on them. She let herself fall into their arms, and soon fell into a slumber filled with mysterious figures and rushing water.

She was soon awoken by the actual splash of water. Hidden by the tall grass, Norella knew that whoever, or whatever, was in that water could not see her before she saw it. She sensed a feeling of danger, for whatever reason, and cautiously shifted so she was lying on her belly. She parted the grass, and gasped at what she found.

A boy! Another child! Norella couldn't contain her excitement, and leapt out of her hiding spot, rushing towards the water. Not realizing until it was too late, Norella stepped onto the bank of the river, slid on mud, and found herself under the water, darkness slowly swallowing her. She felt a hand grab her fragile wrist, and yank her back into the light. Coughing and sputtering, she began to shoot questions at the boy left and right.

“Who are you? Where are you from? Who are your parents? Why have I never seen you before? Why were you in the water? Were you hiding from me? Can we play? Can you show me all the adventures outside? Why are you looking at me like that?” she spit out in one breath.

The boy was staring at her with a look of awe and curiosity, as if he had never seen another child either. He continued to stare for another few minutes, causing Norella’s cheeks to heat up and her to divert her eyes, ignoring his presence for the time being and staring at the ripples in the water that her toes were making. Then he spoke.

“I….I’m Daren,” he muttered. “My parents live beyond those trees, Edward and Marie, along with my four brothers. I’m nine years old; I come out here every day to find fish for my parents to cook for meals. Lately, the fish haven’t been coming to me, so I’ve tried swimming and catching them by hand. That’s why I was in the water.”

“Why were you running at me like that?” he asked Norella.

She wanted to tell him how lonely she was in that great big house, and how all she wanted was someone to call her friend, but all that came out was, “I was excited, that’s all.”

He looked at her strangely, as if knowing that there was more she wanted to say. He didn’t comment, though, instead asking, “Do you want to know a secret?”

In the books she read, friends always shared secrets, so she jumped at this opportunity. He seemed a little apprehensive, and she made a note that she needed to calm down a little bit so she didn’t scare him away.

Although still looking slightly afraid, he started, “My parents always tell my brothers and me the story of the village beneath us. It isn’t like hell or anything, it’s the same as our world,

but upside down underneath us. The village, known as Flitelle, was filled with all kinds of fairytale creatures, instead of people: fairies, elves, goblins, talking plants and animals, and of course the witches and warlocks, too. Well, there is supposed to be an invisible tube somewhere in this pond that is big enough for someone our size to fit in that will take us to Flitelle, and I've been trying to find it. I swear, I've swum through this entire pond, and haven't run into anything. There's probably a secret way to find the tube, I knew it couldn't be as easy as going swimming, but I'm so frustrated. All I wanted was a break from fishing and to have a little fun!"

She could see a tear run down his cheek, and wondered why he was so anxious to escape his family. A real family was all she ever wanted. She didn't say this, but instead, she handed him a rock and grabbed one for herself. She threw the rock with all her might, getting it to skip almost the entire length of the pond. He joined in, and they stood there in silence, letting their frustration with their lives slip into the rocks and fly away from them.

Just as Daren threw his last big rock, something strange happened. There was a huge 'clunk' and the rock bounced back towards him. He and Norella glanced at each other, he grabbed the rock, and aimed for the same spot. Clunk! The rock hit something again. He still didn't believe it, so he grabbed the rock, threw it with all his might, and waited for silence to follow. CLUNK!

Now he knew it was real. They had found that tube, just by throwing silly little rocks. He jumped into the water, and swam to the spot, and realized the tube was no longer invisible. It had a metallic tint to it, and a little door to climb into. He turned around, expecting Norella to be behind him, but instead, she was standing on the bank, watching from afar. He had forgotten she couldn't swim.

He made his way back to shore to get her, and helped her out to the tube. It was big enough for both small children to fit into, so he placed her in first, and climbing in behind her. Half of the door was underwater, yet there was no water in the tube. Neither had any idea of what truly lay ahead of them and as soon as he shut the door, all sunlight was locked out and their world was turned upside down…

## CHAPTER 2

Literally. They were still standing on the ground, but nothing else was right-side up. Everything around them had the same colors as in their world, but it was all upside-down. The buds of the flowers were the base of the plants, with the stems growing up. Norella looked more closely to the tulip bed at her feet, to see if the roots were still the same, and saw that the roots were the closest to her. Now, she knew she wasn't the best at school and didn't always do what Teacher said, but she thought that someone had told her that plants needed the ground to get food. How were they doing that if the roots were coming out the top?

The flowers were the least of their amazements. The trees, with their giant trunks, were flipped, too; their roots extended for yards into the sky, looking like brown streaks of lightening cutting through the blue. What looked like a bird dove expertly through the roots, swooping in and out of the trees, and coming close enough at the last minute for the children to realize that in reality the flying creature was a fish…and it was flying upside-down! They watched the fish soar back into the woods, through the crystal clear sunny sky.

"Wait…where are the clouds?" Norella asked Daren, realizing that she had never seen such a clear sky.

Daren answered slowly, “They’re on the ground, surrounding our feet”, and when Norella looked down, she saw he was right. She could now only see the brown little roots of the tulips barely poking through the top of the fog surrounding her feet. The bursts of cloud on the ground came and went; at certain points they could see patches of grass.

“Maybe it’s just fog,” Norella suggested, though she’d only ever seen fog from the safety of her playroom, but they both knew they were truly clouds when puddles were left behind as they moved on; it wasn’t a full rainstorm, but the droplets were gathering in the clouds, preparing for a storm.

“Where are all the people?” Daren ventured, as the only sounds besides their voices were the rustling of leaves and the call of a fish somewhere in the woods. As soon as he raised the question, the silence seemed to grow ten sizes and terrified the pair. They stood back to back, looking out at their new world, wondering what they had gotten themselves into and why they seemed to be the only “normal” living creatures around.