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A Small Shove



It all began when Eliot Turner revealed that he had superpowers. Because as soon as he had, everyone else seemed to gain them as well.

To be fair, little Connor was the one who revealed them. Wicker Elementary's sixth-grade class walked down the hallway as it always did—in two neat columns, one of pushing boys, the other of shoving girls. There were a few children in the middle, for no apparent reason other than that they could be, which seemed a very good reason indeed when you were in sixth grade and were tired of the bothersome columns.

Connor was one of those rather unfortunate few who were in the middle. He was short and plain, and he was dwelling on his own problems—for everyone has problems, be him an adult of eighty or a child of twelve—so much that he didn't see the line leaders halt at the stairs while the teacher counted heads. He kept walking and ran straight into the boy and girl in front of him.

They stumbled, because even a small shove, if unexpected, could make one trip. Their fall started a chain reaction. Children fell everywhere, to the right, to the left, forward and even backward. Some

tried to keep their balance with graceful hops and tremulous twirls. Only a few succeeded. Most just fell flat.

Eliot was one of those poor few who fell flat. He, as class assistant for the week—a lofty position that he took with pride—stood at the very front, the only student really allowed to be in the middle of the lines. The only thing to fall flat on were the twelve stairs before him. By all rights, he should have crashed down and landed horribly on his face.

To his classmates' and his own surprise, he didn't. One second he was falling, arms flailing around to no avail; the next, Eliot stood on the landing below, as though he hadn't just been one flight of steps up. His hands slowly stopped circling around him and he straightened himself, blinking in shock.

There was an instant uproar. The students rushed to him, nearly tripping themselves again to get down the steps and join their waylaid classmate. Mrs. Garrett, their teacher, was among them, not quite sure what to do but quite positive she was supposed to do something. When it became apparent to everyone that nothing horrendous or even remotely bad had happened, she cleared her throat.

"Yes, in line, in line," she said in a voice that was dryer than usual. "As you were. You all have...what was it, again? Oh, yes, gym." She briefly wondered if her students ought to go to gym class, what with that excitement, whatever it was. Her class watched hopefully. Then she changed her mind, because surely physical education would make things more normal. "Yes, come along. Robert, get back in line. Tess, get out of that center, that's better. Eliot..."

She could think of nothing to do with Eliot, however, so she put him back in the front of the line and led on.

Quiet, however, never quite returned that day. It was apparent to almost every student, that Eliot was special. Not everyone could escape a fall like that.

In fact, the only people who thought Eliot wasn't a superhero of some sort, or at least a highly skilled acrobat, were Connor and Tess. The former was as such because he hadn't actually seen anything, so afraid he would get in trouble for starting a massive fall that he had been hiding behind tall Robert during the entire ordeal.

Tess simply knew better.

Eliot didn't display any signs of his superpowers again, although that didn't stop most of his classmates from watching carefully, just in case. Sean and Robert took turns throwing stuff at him, hoping to catch him off balance, but they hit him more often than not. Grace and Grayson were quite sure his power involved flying—how else had Eliot gotten to

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the bottom of the stairs without cracking his head open or even skinning a knee?—so they tried cajoling him to the top of stairs and to the highest sets on the playground. Eliot politely refused and continued talking to his friends, as usual. His closest comrades, Christian and Emery, tried to get him to explain what had happened, but he was, quite honestly, clueless.

After about a week of this, right before everyone got too bored and moved on to a new subject, a new student got a new superpower. Megan was supposed to be carrying glass vials from the science lab across the hallway into Mrs. Garrett's classroom. Transparent bottles clinked in a cardboard tray.

This would have been fine—Megan had done this several times that year already, because Mrs. Garrett was a fan of chemical reactions and liquids changing colors—except that she was wearing heels for the first time in her life. Thick, obnoxiously light blue heels a good three inches tall that centered on a point at the very back that made balance all but impossible. Megan felt very grown-up. Everyone else was a mixture of impressed and bemused.

However, as she carried those vials, halfway through the hallway she stepped strangely. She knew she had, as soon as she put her right foot down. One aqua heel snapped under her foot, and she tumbled heavily forward. The tray flew to the ground with a loud and brittle tinkling. From inside the room, students could hear a harsh clank and a small shriek. Several classmates rushed out the door, sure what they would see: shattered glass, a fallen Megan, and the end of an unfortunate pair of heels.

Tess was the first to arrive, and Robert after her. There were no broken bottles, no snapped heel. Megan stood stiffly in the center of the hall, shocked, but that was all. The vials still sat on their tray, lying in her hands innocently enough. There was nothing else that could have made that tinkling, breaking sound.

Obviously, Megan must have the power to go back in time, or something of that nature. Even Connor thought so. Tess decided not to tell anyone what she knew really happened.

Other strange events happened, resulting in more seeming powers. Andrew Marrow found he could make his lima bean plants resurrect from dead dry leaves to bulging green pods. Sean breathed underwater for a few minutes, when Connor accidentally dragged him under in the pool; Connor was gifted, he would tell anyone who stopped to listen long enough, with some sort of wind power to help him get out of that pool. There was a rumor that Emery could see into the

future when she somehow convinced Mrs. Garrett the class should stay indoors one windy day, a miracle in its own right—and more so, when an overlarge tree branch fell right over the children’s favorite play spot during recess that afternoon.

Nobody kept the special abilities for very long. That didn’t quite matter. Mrs. Garrett’s sixth grade class, the rest of the school started to murmur, was special. The only one who knew better was Tess.

“In light,” Mrs. Garrett began class one morning, with a long pause, “of recent events,” she paused again, looking from Eliot to Megan to Connor to Emery, “your principal thinks it best—and I quite agree—to have a brief discussion with you.” She always called Ms. Narne “your principal,” as though she were not Mrs. Garrett’s own supervisor as well. Ms. Narne was younger than Mrs. Garrett, and a popular theory among the students was that the latter had been spurned the principal job several times. “She’ll be in this afternoon, so represent us well.”

The lesson started—reading—but no one, not even Emery, who was known for raising her hand too often, paid it much attention. The class was still abuzz as soon as break began, about an hour after the announcement.

“Represent us well,” Eliot repeated with a knowing grin as soon as Mrs. Garrett had turned to write the day’s assignments on the board. “I mean, I’m sure we can do that, since we’re the best class, after all. At least, as class assistant, I think so.”

“Get off it. You exchanged that role Monday. Aren’t you class janitor now?” Sean retorted, pulling an apple out of a sleeve and taking a large, crunchy bite out of it. “Tess is class assistant. Says so on the board. Anyway, you don’t suppose it has anything to do with the...*events*, do you?” Sean asked, looking curiously at Eliot, hoping he would spill something about flight.

Eliot didn’t notice. “Mrs. Garrett did mention ‘in light of recent events,’ so it would have to. Although I’m not sure what Narne thinks she can do. She’s just one person. Our class would be better suited to starting something. Maybe we should rebel.” Now that he wasn’t class assistant, he felt empowered in a different way.

“Rebel what?” Emery asked. She already had her notebook out, to doodle on. “School lunches?”

On the other side of the room, Tess, who was indeed the class assistant that week, was getting instructions from Mrs. Garrett. She hated being class assistant—all the responsibility, when she’d rather be reading or finishing her homework!—but there was not much she could do about it. No one had ever rejected the assistant role, and Tess was

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determined not to be the first. She left the teacher, finally, a long list in her hands. She was just about to start her chores—making sure the waste bin was empty and that the chalkboard was clean, or at least less dusty than usual, and that the class was behaving itself for the most part—when Robert came up beside her. He gave her a long, searching stare, but he didn't say anything for a time. Finally, Tess grew impatient and cleared her throat.

"Yes, Robert?" she asked, flipping her blonde pigtails behind her shoulders to act more professionally. "Can...may I help you with something?" She severely hoped not. She was class assistant, so she was supposed to be available to help anyone—but, as far as she knew, no one had actually gone to a class assistant for help before.

For a small while, it seemed she wouldn't have to; Robert just kept giving her the harsh stare, as though he were trying to read something in her that she wasn't aware she could let be known. Then he took a breath.

"You give powers," Robert said, quite unexpectedly.

For a moment, Tess just stared back. Robert took this as confirmation.

"You do, don't you?" he said in muffled victory. "You really give out powers!" He hopped once, in an excited fashion. If their teacher noticed, she didn't say anything.

"That's ridiculous!" Tess finally sputtered. She looked around the room, but no one attended to them. Small Connor, nearby, picked up paper shreds he'd dropped on the ground, but he didn't matter. Mrs. Garrett was back at her desk talking to Hannah Atkins about a math problem from the previous night's homework, while the rest of the class was in equal parts working and gossiping. Tess looked back at Robert. His too-wide face was still inspecting her. "What gave you that idea, really?"

"Oh, you know, everything," he answered. He looked entirely too pleased with himself. His eyes were shining and his cheeks were starting to glow a ruddy blush that forms when one is proud or excited, or, in this case, both. "Our entire class can't be gifted."

"And why not?"

"It just doesn't make sense," Robert answered simply. "We'd be prodigies. The government would be in to see us, sooner than the principal." At that age, government was still a vague, incomprehensible notion. Government was a large beefy man with a briefcase and handcuffs, or perhaps a silver-haired woman in a black-and-white pencil skirt and a judge's hammer. Neither sounded pleasant. Tess gulped.

"Why would you think I give powers, then? Why not anyone

else?" she asked abruptly.

Robert thought for a moment. He seemed unsure, himself, which Tess noted rather smugly. At long last he answered. "It's just a feeling, I suppose. That, and you get a look whenever something happens. As though you were holding your breath and trying to swallow at the same time. Your face turns reddish, more than normal."

"That's your proof?" Tess laughed, albeit uneasily. "That's nothing. I just get headaches often."

"Liar. You're always there when it happens, too. Just admit it, already."

Try as he might, Robert was too calm for him to be scaring her. And Tess was class assistant for the week, which meant something, much as she hated it. "You're entirely wrong," she said as haughtily as she could. "Besides, the entire class is always there, not just me. Now, excuse me," and she grabbed her duties binder and walked past him, chin high in the air.

She thought she ended that, there and then. She did several of her necessities, told Mary and Sean off for chatting when they should have been studying their algebra, and even convinced Andrew to help clean off the chalkboard.

Her, give powers! What a silly, impossible notion!

Unfortunately, it was entirely true.

Tess had just entered the supply room, a few doors down, to collect the science packets they'd go over that afternoon as they piled up out the printer. Students weren't normally allowed there, except when they were running errands, as Tess was now or like Megan had when the incident with the heels and vials occurred. The room muffled sound nicely, which Tess supposed gave the teachers an air of secrecy when they entered. Really, it was just a glorified closet, with barely enough room for all the cabinets, tables, and printing material that had been shoved inside.

She was just contributing to the mess of papers when the door opened behind her. Small Connor stood in the entrance, watching her knowingly. It was an uncomfortable feeling, being watched as though someone else understood everything. Tess didn't appreciate it. She glared at him and flipped her pigtails around. "Go away. You're not permitted."

"Nor are you to give us powers," he blurted, almost as unexpectedly as when Robert spoke to her earlier. Connor blushed for a moment, which made his orange hair seem to morph into his face, then he continued in a small manner. "You never asked."

"I never gave them!" Tess lied. "That's a horrid rumor, and you know it!"

“Robert thinks it’s true. And he’s usually right about stuff like that.”

“But not this time,” Tess explained. “There was nothing to give! Maybe you’re all just special. Isn’t that good?”

“Not if it’s not true,” Connor said loudly. Tess flinched, he said it in such an accusatory way. She took a deep breath, grabbing more papers heavily. If she ignored him, perhaps the annoying boy would go away, and she could go back to doing her own thing. Namely, she could return to her existence of giving out powers without being questioned. Purposefully ignoring him, Tess started stacking the papers, organizing worksheets and stapling them in the top left corner, packet by packet.

Connor, however, didn’t want to be ignored. After a few moments of watching her shuffle around, he stepped into the room and started talking jubilantly. “See, I was wondering what your limits were,” he said, as if she hadn’t just denied his every word. “There has to be something. Otherwise, I’d still be able to cut through water, and Emery would still predict the future.”

“I didn’t give her that.”

“Oh! So you admit it, you give powers!”

Tess looked down furiously. She hadn’t meant to say anything, except that thing with Emery was a mistake, and she’d been annoyed with it all week. “I never said that. I didn’t give her anything. And that’s the truth.” It was; the Emery thing was a fluke. It was a happy accident, but Tess was almost positive she hadn’t been the cause of it.

“Then,” Connor raised his eyebrows in a crafty way, “you gave all the other powers, just not Emery’s.”

He was entirely too clever for his own good. Tess never realized that about him. Connor usually just sat in the back of the room fiddling with pencil shavings and paper ruffles; he wasn’t normally a threat.

Tess wasn’t sure what she would have done next—perhaps she’d have spilled everything, or perhaps she would’ve convinced him otherwise. Maybe she’d even have given him a new power, something that would get him out of her way, although she didn’t know if she had such a power to give.

However, before she could even respond to his newest accusation, the door opened again. Tess and Connor both jumped guiltily. They stood next to each other—when had Connor gotten so close?—as one of the other teachers entered the supply room. He nodded at them, his grey suit jacket flapping openly, and went straight to pour himself coffee from an ancient-looking machine. The man took a newspaper from the table and sat down and started to read. It seemed he would be in there for a while.

With a glare and a huff, Connor left, stomping his feet angrily as he went.

Tess breathed a sigh of relief, and an even greater sigh came when the teacher left shortly after, while she was only halfway through stapling science packets. She put the stapler down on the round table and closed her eyes. It was a pain, being powered. It meant she had to do stuff, or else she'd feel guilty.

The problem was, her power wasn't like those she gave. She didn't actually have any powers in the usual sense of the word. She couldn't fly or read minds, try as she might. She couldn't breathe underwater or perform amazing feats of strength, or even jump time back a few seconds.

What she could do was much, much stranger, in her opinion. Tess could gift others with those powers. She just couldn't give them to herself.

Which was horribly annoying, because she really wanted to fly someday. Gifting herself just never seemed to work.

Blast Connor! And Robert! They were just scratching at straws, still; they couldn't possibly *know* Tess was the cause of all the heroic—or more heroic than usual—saves Mrs. Garrett's class had lately. He just chose her because...because...for no good reason. Robert was immature and Connor was just a little boy, and Tess had half a mind to tell the teacher they'd been spreading rumors, or to use her privileges as class assistant to alter their records herself. She didn't know if she had such privileges, and she didn't quite dare, but it was tempting.

Of course she hadn't asked if anyone had wanted powers; most of the time, it was a split decision, like with Eliot. If she hadn't acted, he'd have been injured, probably quite badly. And, even if she were to ask, where would she start? "Yes, I give out powers," Tess muttered to herself. "So, do you want to fly?"

She could see a million reasons wrong with letting people know that; she had thought of most of them when she first discovered her power about a year ago, when she had accidentally let her mother read her father's mind. That wasn't something she cared to remember, come to think of it. There was a lot of yelling, and her parents hadn't been all too friendly since then.

Tess returned to stapling with fervor. She would just have to be more careful, somehow. Maybe she'd have to feel guilty and not help everyone, not when it wasn't important. She needn't have helped Andrew with his beans; that was a whim. And Sean would have been fine in the water; Connor, too, for that matter. She should have just let Connor drown.

Why, Robert and Connor could have her power, if they cared so much! Tess finished the papers and threw the stapler back into its drawer, returning to the table to angrily pat the papers into a neat, even stack. She stomped her way out, just as Connor had. As she left the room, she imagined how nice it would be if someone else had to be responsible for helping others. Connor would be overwhelmed in a day! Her face screwed in annoyance as she considered the idea, of him having her power, the stupidest, most bothersome power of all—

At that moment, in the middle of the hallway, in the midst of her imaginings, something changed.

It was as if the air around her was sucked away. She could still breathe, but it was uncomfortable, like it was after holding one's breath for too long. Everything felt fuzzy and muddled; the walls seemed immensely long, the carpet deep and rough and thick, the ceiling stories tall—and then everything bounced back, unmistakably clear and vivid and as it should have been.

And yet the air still seemed wrong. It was thinner, perhaps, Tess thought, vaguely. She blinked. Her hands were scrunching up the packets, creating conspicuous creases along them as she held too tightly. Taking an unsatisfactory breath, Tess darted down the hallway and back inside her classroom.

In there, everything seemed normal. Mrs. Garrett was just finishing up helping Hannah with her math problem from however long ago. Andrew was still trying to move the dust on the chalkboard around, although he had mostly given up and kept dropping the eraser to make a white splotch on the carpet. Connor had taken his seat in the back of the class, although when Tess entered he glared heavily at her. Robert glared as well, from his perch by the back wall. She glared right back, but it didn't last. Nor did theirs, for that matter. They seemed out of it; Connor was tapping his desk loudly with his pencil and Robert went to staring out the window again, although no one seemed to mind much.

Tess decided to continue ignoring them. She gave the papers to Mrs. Garrett, who nodded and went back to working on grading worksheets. Tess returned to her seat and took out her folders, flipping through them without actually seeing anything. A remarkably small amount of time had passed since she had gone to the supplies room, but it seemed like hours. She was growing rather concerned at how horrible everything felt. Maybe she was sick—that would account for the strange shortness of breath; but when she felt her forehead, it felt cold, not hot.

During the rest of the morning's classes, there was little she could do. Everything was off, in a way that made everything seem clear except

the air, somehow. She only half paid attention to the lessons, and when it came time to organize the class to go to the lunchroom, a duty held by class assistant, Robert, taking pity on her, helped her shout everyone into their lines. At lunch, she found her appetite was gone; during recess, she sat at the corner of the ball court, unclear enough to even care if a ball came at her.

She was so out of it, she didn't even notice Connor join her until he must have been there for a while. "Hey," he said. Tess must have seen him sit down, cross-legged, next to her—he wasn't trying to hide, after all—except she hadn't noticed, or at least processed, that he had.

"You again," she said in a resigned manner. He seemed determined to bug her today.

"Yep," Connor responded, tapping the ground as he had tapped his desk, in his antsy way. "What did you do?"

"Nothing," Tess said sorrowfully. "Please stop asking." She hugged her knees closer, although that didn't seem to help at all.

Connor gave her one of his looks. "Do you feel okay?"

"Not especially," she said. "Go away."

He didn't, however. "You have to have done something," Connor insisted. "Because—"

Tess didn't attend to what happened, but she saw it in her blank stare. A ball flew toward them, big and bright orange and about as large as her head. It came right at her. Normally, she would have scrunched up her face and imagined someone—perhaps Chris, he was nearby—to come and do something to stop the ball. Super-speed, perhaps. He was already moving; it would be a cinch just to give him the extra distance. But she didn't have the energy right then, and, besides, Connor was right next to her. He didn't need any more reason to incriminate her of giving away powers without asking—

And then Chris was holding the ball a few inches from her face. Tess flinched suddenly, and perhaps a little lately. By that time, the rest of the class, always on the lookout for the development of a new power, had noticed; they were gathering around Chris, who stood awkwardly and red-faced.

"I didn't do that," Tess said quickly to Connor. "I swear, that wasn't me."

She needn't have said anything, however, because his face was scrunched up and puckered, and he was glaring at her. "That was me."

"But...you're normal."

"I know. Do you see the problem? I've never done this before. So what did you do?"

“I must have...but...” Tess fought against the vivid haze. “I...I imagined you with my powers, since you were so insistent I was doing it wrong—”

“I never said that!”

“—and...and I made a mistake,” she realized. “I gave you my power, of giving people power.” That wasn’t supposed to happen, not at all. She hadn’t even thought it were possible, to give someone her own unique skill.

Tess was quite alarmed now. She looked around. Spotting Grace, she concentrated on giving her...she thought for a moment...flight usually worked well. She tried giving Grace flight.

Grace’s feet stayed firmly planted on the ground.

Tess quickly turned. She felt she should say something, only words wouldn’t be enough. She kept trying. She gifted Grayson with super-strength, Sean with strong hearing, Yasmine with the ability to speak to the squirrel that was a foot from her.

Nothing unusual happened.

The crowd of congratulatory children talked loudly before them, still interested in Chris and his miraculous save. A few teachers were coming over to see why so many students were gathered so unexpectedly. Even the kids who usually joked around on the swing set had forsaken the heights and were rushing over. Students not from Mrs. Garrett’s class were trying to shove their way past—they thought they had the right to know the peculiars by then—but Mrs. Garrett’s sixth graders shoved right back. No one seemed to notice Tess and Connor sitting on the ground a few feet from them.

That was probably for the better. Connor looked angry rather than relieved, and Tess was too tired and astonished and worried to fake excitement at a new power. The noise made it so they couldn’t talk properly where they were, and by the time Connor had dragged Tess off the asphalt and to a more deserted section under a slide, the bell was ringing for recess to end.

Still, as she shuffled her way in line behind giggling Hannah and Mary, Tess realized something would have to be done.

At first, it seemed there would be no time to do anything. Mrs. Garrett was a flustered mess during their math lesson, so much so that when she tried to throw a piece of paper into the trash can next to her desk, she missed twice and had to have Robert pluck it in for her. The class was all whispers, with more than one admiring glare to poor Charles, who was altogether wishing he had never played ball to begin with.

Things kept happening, the wrong sort. Chalk broke for no reason in Mrs. Garrett's hand. When she tried to put it down, it made a scratching noise and a line appeared in the air before her, as though there were an invisible board in the air itself—where it stayed for a stunned minute before disappearing in a small heap of dust. The math lesson ended shortly afterward, and then there was science, but something was off there, as well. When Hannah tried to pass out the packets, she found them hovering wherever she left them. Talk quickly left Charles and turned to her, and then to Eliot when he displayed a new power of setting his packet on fire. Mary saved the day with some sort of freezing skill that left Eliot's desk, as well as half the room, covered with breezy white snowflakes, not unlike the chalk dust.

During this time, Robert, rather unhelpfully, glared at Tess, quite sure she was responsible for the strange uncontrollable disasters all over. Tess equally glared at Connor next to her, who glared right back, although he looked rather smug now.

Several minutes later, when the lesson had grinded to a halt and most of the class awed at the sudden variety in powers, there was no mistaking it: he was definitely smug. All traces of anger had been lost.

"Connor," Tess said between her teeth.

"Yes?" he asked with a hyper sort of calm.

"You've had your fun. Now, give it back."

"But you weren't doing anything," he said in a mock falsetto, "and nor am I."

"Connor!" Tess said sharply through the clear haze that still besieged her. "This isn't funny. I'm sorry I lied, but, really. There's responsibilities. And you don't know them." Tess didn't quite know the extent of the responsibilities herself, but she decided not to mention that.

With a flick of his hand, Connor reclined against his desk. "Who cares if you lied? I see why. This is awesome."

It really wasn't. Connor didn't understand how much a duty it was to have this kind of control. Tess didn't know how to describe it—it just *existed*, and limited. Limits were what Connor needed. Hadn't he asked about that before? It seemed he'd quite forgotten any of his earlier qualms. "Aren't you worried about being caught?" Tess asked hurriedly. "Think how bothersome it'd be if people knew, and were always coming to you to make you give them impossible wishes."

She would have gone on, except loud noises were erupting from somewhere in the back of the room, and Connor joined most of the class in whooping and shouting encouragements to whoever was causing the

sounds. Tess took out her anger by jabbing him with the back of her pencil.

His smugness dissipated when Eliot, trying to unfreeze his desk, let his fire power get out of control. He shook his hand, as one would after it had been grasping something for too long. Several heated sparks fell from it, onto the carpet. They might not have spread—had not Lily Anderson, who had spent all week hoping loudly for the gift of flight, suddenly garnered a wind power. She shot in the air, to her surprise and delight. The fire, incited by her sudden movement and the gust it created, grew.

No one noticed the fire at first. They were all too busy coming to terms with their giftedness, as most of the class was, or glaring at one another, as Tess, Connor, and Robert were.

Mrs. Garrett saw, however, as it took a friendly light on Eliot's desk. She calmly went over to him and asked in a resigned manner, "Dear, put out the fire. Sooner, rather than later."

Eliot, sheepish, bent down and blew on it. The fire was so small, a direct gust would have easily destroyed it, no harm done. Mrs. Garrett hadn't remembered Eliot's new power, however. Out of his mouth didn't come quenching air, but more flame.

For her part, Mrs. Garrett remained calm. Tess thought she was rather in a state of shock. It came of having too much unpredictability in one class. Mrs. Garrett, slowly and surely, looked over to Mary and said, "You had the ice, yes? Would you mind?"

Mary looked over from where she had been talking with Hannah. She was shocked for a moment—she hadn't noticed the fire, but now the rest of the class was catching on. Mary nodded and pointed her palms at the growing fire. Ice shot out. It hit the fire straight on.

However, the fire didn't disappear. At this point, the rest of the class—even Andrew, who had regained his ability to grow lima bean plants and was enjoying himself in the back of the room in a tangle of vines—noticed. They all stopped what they were doing and stared. Where the fire had been, and the ice had been shot, was a swirling icy blue mass. It was as though the fire and ice had joined, or were battling for dominance.

There was a hushed silence for a moment.

"What did you give?" Tess asked in utter awe.

Connor blinked, stunned himself. "I...I was...just imagining."

The fire-ice mixture was still for a moment more. Then it started to grow, cackling and cracking uncomfortably in sharp bursts.

Mrs. Garrett's sixth grade class ought to have been commended.

No one ran. No one screamed. Perhaps they behaved too rationally. One by one, the class stood up and hurried to the door, single-file as they'd practiced every month.

Again, they hadn't remembered one of the powers. Hannah, who had gotten to the door first, quickly walked outside, letting the door swing shut behind her. When Emery, who was next to reach it, tried to push it open, she found she was quite unable to. The door was stuck as it was, not unlike the packets had been when they had floated over the desks where Hannah had placed them.

"Hannah! Hannah, calm down and pull this open!" Emery called out in a carrying whisper. Hannah, however, was already down the hall, completely unaware of what she had done. Perhaps there was delayed reaction to what was happening inside. Whatever it was, she didn't have any wish to return to the classroom and its oddities.

The door was left open a few inches—enough for Emery to get her hand through, but not enough for even Connor, if he so tried, to squeeze around. Not that he did try.

Tess shot another dirty look at Connor, who watched the fire in amazement. "Give it back. Now! You're doing it all wrong!"

"Connor had the power?" came Robert's voice. Tess jumped and looked around. He was standing next to her desk and gazing thoughtfully at the ice-fire. "Tess, you're invisible, you know that?"

"Of course." She hadn't, but when she looked down at where she knew she was, she saw nothing but her chair under her. Tess fumed. Turning people invisible—what gave Connor the right?! She was even more annoyed that, when she finally got a superpower, it was something as meaningless as invisibility. "Connor, you give it back right now!"

"No!" he shot back. "This is too interesting!"

"That's not interesting—that's dangerous! You're going to kill someone!"

"Connor has the power?" Robert asked again. His head turned from where he supposed Tess was to the smaller boy, and back again.

Connor ignored him. "I haven't yet, have I? I've got this all under control!"

The fire was still growing; it was now consuming several desks. What it touched first sizzled, then froze in a sheen of ice, which then melted in a puddle of water. It didn't look dangerous, but nor did it look exactly safe.

"Control? That's not control, that's chaos!"

"I'm not worse than you were, so shove off!"

"Connor has control?" Robert questioned insistently.

This time, Tess deemed to answer him. "Yes! He stole it, and he's making a mess of things, and I want it back!" She waved her arms indignantly, then snorted harshly when she realized no one could see them, anyway.

"I didn't steal it! You gave it up to me," Connor shot back.

It was pure luck that no one heard them. The rest of the class had decided the safest way out would be through the windows, into the courtyard. However, Andrew's lima beans had grown extraordinarily well and were covering the panes. Half the class was hacking at the stems with safety scissors, and the other half was trying to stop the fire. Mrs. Garrett directed, still utterly calm. Perhaps she thought she was in a dream.

Nothing seemed to stop the ice-fire. Stomping on it only left half-melted, half-frozen shoes; soon there was a pile of destroyed footwear lying in the corner. Water froze, and air just made it spin in circles. Emery had the bright idea to put regular kindling in it, and she was right, in a sense; the paper fizzled and simply disappeared in the flames without any sign of burning. It didn't stop the ice-fire, however, and now the fire had a strange quality of paper smell about it.

Mary and Eliot looked especially guilty. As far as they knew, they had caused the catastrophe, and nothing they did would stop it. Neither wanted to use his or her power again, for fear something else would go horribly wrong.

Again, Connor had given the powers too well. Nothing the class did would destroy the lima bean shoots. Where one was cut, another instantly grew. Andrew even turned and sat in a corner, and tried to will the plants to return to their dying seedlings, but the plants didn't agree with that. The entire wall, windows and ceiling, were covered with irremovable vines.

"Connor," Robert said softly, when the fire had taken up half the room and the class gathered against the far wall, "give me a power."

"What? You? No way!" he responded. Robert and he had never got along. Robert was smart and aloof, and while Connor was also intelligent and a loner, they acted in different ways. Robert could get along with anyone; he just chose not to. Connor, however, listened to the entire class and never seemed to be heard in return.

However, even he could feel the ice-fire now, a horrible mixture of intense heat and extreme cold. His body couldn't figure out how to respond, so it just became clammy and sweaty. "What kind of power?" he asked suspiciously.

Robert whispered something. Connor thought for a moment;

then he nodded.

Tess could feel Connor give out the power. It was similar to a rush of wind, although it didn't move anything as it swept from him to Robert. Perhaps that was why Robert had been so sure she gave out powers, and why he couldn't explain why he knew.

Robert went straight to the wall. No one thought it odd; Sean even moved out of his way. The class had long since passed the boundary of disbelief. The only thing left was inexplicable acceptance. Everyone watched silently as Robert pressed his hands gently on the plaster bricks. He pushed, slightly at first, then harder and harder.

The wall crumbled neatly in front of him. Not the entire wall—just enough to form a rather concise hole, a foot taller than he was and about twice as wide as his shoulders. It led into the hallway. Robert turned back to the class and gave a wry grin.

"Everyone, single-file, please," Mrs. Garrett said politely. Again, nobody rushed. Tess was jostled until she started speaking, at which point students realized they couldn't see her and gave the disembodied voice some space. Still, she and Connor were the last students out.

"Connor," Robert said slowly as the small boy walked out, "what did you do this time?"

The hall wasn't a hall anymore. Or, rather, it was a hall that didn't connect to anything. There were no walls; it was as if, after leaving the classroom, the school just vanished. There was a patch of light where the class had left their room, but that was the only sign of anything related to a classroom. Around them was just empty space; below them was the rectangular shape of the carpeted hallway, but where the walls would have been there seemed to be a never-ending drop.

Connor seemed to grow smaller into himself. "I...nothing. Nothing!" Then, in a mere whisper, "I was just imagining."

"Who did you give this to?"

"I...I'm not sure. Mrs. Garrett, perhaps. Or Lidia. I don't know!"

The class had nowhere to go. It stood in a huddle in the middle of the floor, whispering. They might have stood there till the end of time, except Tess looked back and saw a flicker of blue-red flame licking through the hole in the emptiness. "Connor, you dolt!"

And then there was pandemonium. It was a reserved chaos, but, still, there was finally the running and muffled screaming one would have expected a half-hour ago. "There's nothing there," one student shouted. Another sat down on the floor, as though it would do something productive.

Mrs. Garrett was at a loss. This had to be a dream, and a bad one,

at that. She tried to organize the class again, but her voice was too quiet and her will was gone.

“You have to give Tess back the power,” Robert said bluntly. He towered over Connor, a dangerous gleam in his eyes.

Connor immediately shook his head. “No way. She would make just as much a mess!”

“But she never did before!”

“How do you know? Maybe she gave someone a power to erase memories!”

Tess flinched. She had never done such a thing—but she might have. It crossed her mind, now: If she did that, then her parents wouldn’t argue so much and Robert would never have accused her and let Connor hear and accidentally make him cause this disaster.

The fact was, she never even considered it before. She was about to say so when something knocked into her from the side. Sean didn’t see her as he ran around the hallway floor, trying to find a way out. Tess lost her balance—and balance is hard to regain when one can’t see where one’s legs are. Before she knew it, she fell. It was pure luck that she managed to twist herself and grab the edge of the hallway by her elbows. Her invisible feet dangled below her; her arms struggled to keep hold. If someone were to trip on her, she would fall.

“Help,” she said quietly. She might have said it louder, except everyone else had taken up screaming similarly. “Please.” Everything was clear and fuzzy, and her arms tingled and her feet twisted, trying to find something to step on that wasn’t there.

Robert, in the meantime, had decided he would make Connor give back the power. The ice-fire was through the door. It swirled around, dividing the hallway in half. They had to act soon, before it touched one of them and did something horrible. He grabbed Connor’s arm roughly and pulled him along. “Tess, Connor’s going to give it back. Now.”

Tess didn’t answer. She was having trouble breathing, the ice-fire was so close. Smoke kept getting in her face, causing her to cough, and then a burst of dry cold would come and cause her to cough even more.

Robert realized Tess wasn’t with them. He turned around several times, trying to locate her—then he remembered she was invisible, anyway. “Connor!”

“I’m trying, I’m trying!” Connor responded avidly. He stared at the fire in shock. Whenever he tried to focus his mind, he saw one of the flames lick forward, and the concentration broke. Half the class huddled at one end of the hall; the other half, separated by the fire, grouped around the other side. There was no sign of Tess.

It was that realization—that Tess was missing completely—that made Connor especially nervous. What if he, accidentally, gave someone a power to make someone else disappear for good? What if he made her cease to exist completely? He breathed heavily; everything seemed to spin around him, but perhaps that was the dry smoke that congregated.

He screwed up his face and thought as hard as he could.

For Tess, it seemed the entire room sagged. She nearly lost her hold on the floor. Everything seemed to stretch around them, like a widening mouth—and then the mouth closed, in a way, and everything shot back to normal. When the mouth closed, it swallowed with it the dizzying fuzzy clearness. Tess gasped slightly and looked around in relief. The fuzzy clearness had gone. Through the flames she could see Connor gasping heavily and Robert looking frantically for Tess.

There was no time to make her presence known. She closed her eyes and focused.

After a moment, she opened them again.

The walls were back. Classroom doors, bad drawings, school announcements all fluttered around them. The ice-fire disappeared; the floors showed no sign it ever existed, but for a few rather black spots and several strange ice patches.

Tess herself was still dangling. She had somehow arrived at the stairwell, on the other side of the metal railing that normally stopped students from falling over. She didn't know how she got so far from the classroom, but it appeared the altered space they had been in had strange proportions; students that had been grouped together were now feet apart.

Then Robert and Conner arrived in front of her. They could see her again—once she got her power back, she lost her invisibility. With more struggle than was perhaps necessary, they pulled her up over the railing and back onto solid ground.

Tess didn't realize until she was panting on the rough carpet that she forgot to give them superpowers.

They didn't say anything. Connor looked guiltily at the ground; Robert held his head high, but he appeared guilty, also, for some reason. Tess, for her part, had nothing to say. She was just tired.

The class slowly gathered back in the classroom, arriving in small trickles and pairs. The room, normal again, showed remarkably few scars from the prior events. Only the lima beans, still reaching the ceiling, were any indication that something strange had happened. Each student took his or her seat heavily. Mrs. Garrett sat at her desk, staring at the chalkboard. Even Hannah returned; it seemed she spent the last bit of

time hiding in the girls' bathroom on the first floor.

When the principal came in, she found a well-behaved class. The only comment she gave at the end of her short inspection—for the students seemed to be having a private study time, and had taken out books and drawings and homework, one by one, to work on—was that the lima beans ought to be in the county fair.

By the time school ended, Mrs. Garrett's sixth grade class set a new record for silence. They left, single-file, quietly and orderly. If they went straight to their rooms when they arrived home, and were more taciturn than normal that night, no parent would complain. And if several called off the next day due to strange fits of coughing, no one thought that too abnormal.

And if Connor was a little nicer the next day, and Robert a little less aloof, and Tess a little more talkative to the two, then no one thought that odd, either. After all, superpowers still appeared.