

# Chapter 1

## Eleanor



To begin with, Scrumpy the Fourth went belly-up somewhere between the old house and the new house.

And Scrumpy the Fourth was almost brand-new, because Scrumpy the Third had keeled over only last week. “You poor little thing,” Eleanor said to the dead goldfish. She tugged against her seat belt to curl over the fishbowl on her lap. “You kicked the bucket, you bought the farm, you bit the dust, you crushed up your chips—”

“That’s not right,” said Eleanor’s older sister from the front seat. Alicia was in sixth grade and knew *everything*. “Crush up your chips is wrong.”

“It is *not* wrong,” said Eleanor. “If you crush up your chips, then your chips are dead.” Alicia couldn’t really argue with that. Crushed chips

were no good, unless they were on top of corn-and-bean hot dish.

The car stopped. Eleanor climbed out. “See?” she said to her mom, who had been driving.

“Scrumpy’s a goner. That’s *another* reason why we shouldn’t move.”



Eleanor's mother sighed.

Eleanor's dad stood in the doorway to the new duplex, next to her big brother Aaron, who was in high school. They were the same height, but Aaron was skinnier.

Dad said, "Come in! We've already put the beds together."

Mom and Alicia took bags of clothes from the trunk and walked up the steps into the new apartment. Eleanor marched slowly and majestically along the sidewalk, carrying her fishbowl and humming the tune from *Star Wars*. The old, old *Star Wars*. The one with Princess Leia. Eleanor was glad to be wearing her glitteriest skirt. Dead Scrumpty the Fourth deserved some honor.

Alicia and Mom went into the house with Aaron. Dad came down the steps toward Eleanor. "I'm sorry, honey. Will there be a funeral tonight?"

Eleanor stopped humming because she had suddenly thought of something. "We can't do a funeral here. It needs to be at the old house, in the backyard. With Scrumpy One, Two, and Three."

Dad said, "We don't own the old house anymore. This is our house now."

"Our *duplex*," said Eleanor. "And not even *ours*." She studied the two-family house. It was yellow. Their old house was blue. Eleanor hated yellow. She loved blue. She hated duplexes. She loved houses. Houses stood all

by themselves with no one living above you. Houses were where you didn't have to be quiet and worry about waking someone up when you played superhero.

She'd already been warned about superhero.

Houses were places where you could nail gears and pulleys to your wall and no landlord got mad at you (except maybe Mom and Dad). She'd been warned about nails and pulleys too.

Houses might have a bedroom just for you, on the second floor. In a duplex, everyone was on the first floor because some other family was on the second floor, and you shared a room with your sister Alicia, who thought

you were a baby because you were eight. Like Alicia had never been eight.

Eleanor thought a lot of things, but most of them were about how she didn't want to live here.

"Eleanor?" said Dad. "I really think you'll like the house."

"The *duplex*," said Eleanor.

"Fine. Yes." Dad walked toward the house, then turned back to her. "There's a boy living upstairs who is almost the same age as you. He's seven."

"I'm eight." Seven was not even close to the same as eight.

"Maybe you can be friends." He sighed. "People are flexible, Eleanor. You can adjust."

You can even learn to love a new home.”

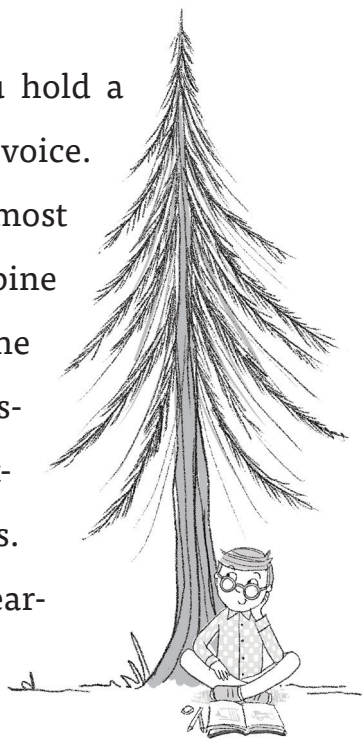
Eleanor turned and paraded down the sidewalk. This time she hummed the Darth Vader tune, in a very somber way. By the time she turned back, her dad had gone inside.

*They don't care, she thought, about the old house or the old neighborhood, and they don't care about Scrumpy the Fourth or about me. There will be a funeral—at the old house.* She held the goldfish bowl aloft, like Darth Vader might hold a lightsaber (except she had to use two hands because she didn't want to spill), and she tried to make her voice deep like Vader's. “I swear to you, Scrumpy the Fourth, that I will bring you back to your rightful home and bury you beside your family.” *And, she added*

to herself, *I'll move back there. Because I'm not staying here.* She buzzed the laser sound to make it all official.

“That’s not how you hold a sword,” said a high, light voice.

Eleanor looked. Almost hidden under the big pine tree on the edge of the yard, a small boy sat cross-legged. He had light-brown hair and glasses. Probably the seven-year-old. Probably only a first-grader.



The boy said, “I mean, if that’s supposed to be a sword, you’re doing it wrong.”