

# **Little One: A Modernized Thumbelina Novel**

## **Honors Thesis**

**Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of Bachelor of English**

In the College of Arts and Sciences  
at Salem State University

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Commonwealth Honors Program  
Salem State University  
2016

## Abstract

Based off of the Hans Christian Anderson story “Thumbelina”, this reimagining puts the character of Thumbelina into a modern setting. The beginning of the novel includes a diverse set of the author’s original characters and characters adapted from the Anderson story. Thus far, the novel brings a fantastical quality to a world much like the one around children today. It includes representation of disenfranchised groups of people as well as representation of the conflicts within the modern world and possible solutions. It also touches on universal themes and weaves a story that will entertain and enlighten young readers.

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### Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge Joanna Gonsalves and J.D. Scrimgeour first for their advice and help in generating this work of fiction. It would never have been possible without their guidance. I would also like to thank all of my previous teachers, especially those who inspired my love for education, writing, and reading. Last but not least, I would like to thank my friends and family who have supported me throughout my life; it is the rich and wonderful experiences with you all that helps fuel my imagination and keep me writing. Thank you all so very much!

### Process Information

When I started this project, I wanted to write a modernized Thumbelina novel. For the novel to be modern it would have to include diverse characters and multicultural influences. It needed to be a novel that kids today could relate to on a meaningful level or else they would simply put it down and walk away. I determined that the audience would be children around the fourth or fifth grade reading level.

As I started writing the novel, I decided to make Thumbelina's adoptive father, Julio, from Puerto Rico, since many children I have worked with, while volunteering at Salem State University, were from there. Julio's character turned out to be the opposite of his wife, Eliza's, and I hope this is charming to the reader, since they love each other so earnestly but are so different. Unfortunately, Eliza ends up being a single parent to Thumbelina, which I think will appeal to children with diverse family structures, especially those with only one parent present.

I included other diverse family structures as well in the novel. One character has two mothers. Another family presented is a single father, Timothy, and his son, Robby, who are rats that are immigrant workers; they do handiwork for room and board. This adds in another multicultural element to the novel: economic status. While Marie, a mouse, lives with guest rooms and in general comfort, she does not think to let Timothy and Robby live with her.

The character of Marie and her friend Mr. Vernon the mole also present the concept of prejudice within the novel with their views about humans. Ironically the rats turn out to be much nicer than the mouse and mole, showing that characters aren't always how they initially appear.

Another modern concept I include in the novel is the environment and problems with pollution and global warming. I introduce the concept by having a scene where litter has built up in a stream and the characters comment on it. They discuss how the pollution restricts the availability of clean drinking and cooking water for their community.

As I went along writing, I was inspired to create a character that did not fit into the binary of boy or girl. Instead, the character will be gender-fluid (I have yet to get to the introduction of the character). There is such little representation of the transgender and non-binary community in written and visual media, so I thought this would be a great character to include.

Overall, I am happy with the different multicultural elements and modern ideas I have included so far. My main fear with the inclusion of some concepts would be that it would get too preachy or stick out too much from the flow of the novel, but fortunately people who have read the manuscript so far have commented that it is included smoothly within the narrative.

### Reflection

I learned a lot as a result of working on this creative project. I think the most important lesson I learned is that people who read and critique your work will see a lot more possibilities and good aspects in it than you as the writer ever will. I never considered writing, or doing anything within the English field besides teaching, as something other than a ridiculous dream, but too many people over the time I've been working on this novel have given me positive feedback. It seems like a waste of my time and their time to never give my work a chance to cross an editor's desk.

I also learned so much about crafting a story. I learned about different plot structures and decided that the novel would be split up in two sections: Thumbelina finding information about who she is and where she came from and Thumbelina coming into a leadership position. I learned that setting can be backdrop or more influential to the storyline; setting in this novel is a strong influence since it is used to create conflict. I also wanted setting to establish the tone for certain scenes, whether it be spring representing beginnings and hope or winter representing struggle and fear.

I put much thought into the characters because the more I compose, the more it proves true that strong rounded characters with complex personalities tend to make a story easier to write. Instead of being lost in the middle of the novel, despite having a clear end in sight, I can simply ask myself what this character would do now. Ultimately the motivations of the characters are what keeps the story marching forward toward a previously set goal, and if the characters decide to surprise me with a different ending than what was intended, that's okay, too. The characters that writers create don't necessarily stick to the plan the author has in mind because they aren't the author but other people entirely. They have their own speech pattern, gestures, facial expressions, physical features, fears, hopes, and flaws.

Thumbelina wouldn't have stayed at Marie's house even if I wanted her to because that's not what she is about. Her main motivations are a need for freedom, knowledge, and belonging. Once she felt like "the help" being looked down upon, she decided to take her chances in the freezing cold. Thumbelina has a stubborn determination to get what she needs, and her vast knowledge of plants, both wild and cultivated, makes her more capable than many people expect. Yet, while being reckless,

she is still a bit unsure of herself because she has been told for years that she can't do many different things.

In terms of how this novel contributes to society as a whole; that is yet to be seen. If the novel eventually gets published, then I hope it would become a story that children will enjoy. For the future, I hope to finish writing the rough draft of the novel and then polish it as much as possible before sending it out to be considered for publication. I'll keep trying to get it published for a few years. After a while, I'll move onto a new project, or finish the ones I've already started. My hope is to reach even a small percentage of the population with my creative writing, but for now I will be focusing on completing my work; that's a large accomplishment in and of itself.

Little One

By Megan Horn

## Chapter 1

There was a woman named Eliza who had a husband named Julio who enjoyed the indoors. Ever since Eliza was young she played with worms in the black dirt, named as many plants as she could, and kept wildflower seeds in her pocket. You see, dear reader, she was destined to be a gardener. Yet she felt empty, as did the house, despite having pets and as many plants as she could fit into their one bedroom apartment.

Her husband often tried to comfort her through his own emptiness. She felt some changes needed to be made.

“Every single day you stay inside too much. You need to get more fresh air and sunshine. It’s no good to hide inside,” She said one day to him.

He was lying on the soft green sofa with his nose thoroughly in a book.

“I don’t see anything wrong with it. I feel perfectly healthy,” he said.

“Really? So you don’t feel tired during the day? And you never ever have indigestion,” she said back.

“I’m healthy. I’m well rested,” Julio said.

He yawned and ran his fingers through his thick, curly hair. Eliza rolled her eyes.

“Very funny. You should join me in the garden. How about we start right now?” she suggested. Although her tone was light, her expression left no room for argument.

“Why did I marry a woman who loves torturing me,” he muttered to himself.

Eliza tossed seed packets and sunblock into his lap from across the room.

“You know you love it,” she teased.

“Fine. If this will make you happy, I suppose I can weather the elements.”

He hauled himself off the couch, knees popping and groaning, and trudged after Eliza.

As he promised, Julio made time to join his wife in the garden, pulling weeds and tending flowers. He hated to admit it, but this time they spent together did make him happier.

One cool summer night, the two sprawled on the grass and looked at the stars. The backyard was in the shape of a triangle, with a red fence and a back wall of another apartment building creating a point.

Ivy crept here and there and wildflowers spread next to the back wall. A small pink rose bush was where the fence and wall met and a bird bath stood next to it. A low rock wall portioned off a rectangle for vegetables and fruit: Squash plants with wide fuzzy leaves, a tomato plant supported with a wooden stake, different root vegetables with leafy stems, string beans climbed the fence, spinach, lettuce, and small ground blueberry and strawberry bushes sprawled across the garden. And wherever Eliza could find room, pots of almost every type of herb dotted the yard. All that was left for sitting room was the size of a picnic blanket.

Julio whistled the theme song from *Star Trek*. Eliza giggled.

“Look at all those stars,” Julio commented.

“They make me feel really small. I’m not sure I like it. It’s,” Eliza paused searching for the right word, “unnerving.”

“I like it. Open, free, and plenty we don’t know,” he spread his arms wide, “The Earth is being hurled through space. Time marching forward. One day we are here and the next,” Julio snapped his fingers, “another spot in space.”

“Or gone. And nobody to pass on that we were here. One day the garden, this place, even we will just be memories. But who will remember us? Who will tend this garden?”

Julio rubbed his stubbled chin.

“I don’t know. What makes you say all this?”

“I mean, who will continue what we started here?” Eliza said.

“Somebody. Does it really matter? Are you okay?” Julio responded. He propped himself up with his arms behind him.

“I can’t have a baby and it’s been a year since we heard from the adoption agency.”

“I know and I know how much it hurts you. It’s literally surrounding us. You put so much care into the plants.”

“I just think this garden is important and ...do you ever think that there is more to the garden than what we can see?” Eliza propped herself up with her elbow.

“You’ve put so much hope into it. I understand why you feel that way,” he said.

“It’s not that.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean... I’ve just noticed strange things happening.”

Julio raised his eyebrow. Eliza sighed.

“I don’t know. I’m probably just being silly. Forget it,” she huffed.

“No, no. I’m sorry. Tell me, my dear.”

“It’s small things like hearing scampering--”

“-probably a rabbit?”

“Maybe, but our hostas are still intact and bunnies love those. And ... you’re going to think I’m nuts”

“Go on,” Julio’s voice softened.

“It sounds like little voices talking,” said Eliza.

“Hmm. Are you sure? You’ve been very stressed lately.”

“Maybe or maybe...” Eliza continued sadly, “maybe I just wish there were little scampering feet and little voices.”

“I know.” Julio said and kissed Eliza’s forehead, “I wish that, too.”

Eliza heard tiny feet hitting the ground and could have sworn she heard a small voice say the word "child". She kept this to herself and paid it no mind. There was no need to worry Julio further.

“Well sweetie. I am tired. I think it’s about time we head off to bed.”

Julio stood from the ground and reached his hand out. Eliza took it and rose as well. Hand in hand, the two climbed the stairs of the porch and entered their apartment building.

Without their knowledge, at that very moment, there were small feet scampering. A tiny woman and man walked through the garden. The leaves and stalks of the flowers towered over them. The bushes were like trees to them and cast a dark shadow over the two. The man stood six inches tall and the woman stood three.

The tiny woman was named Belinda. Belinda had her blonde hair tied in a bun. She wore a brown dress with green ivy embroidered on it. Belinda had a heart-shaped face and was short and stout. Belinda held a baby, the size of a bean, bundled in a blanket woven out of milkweed puffs and spider webs. Belinda gazed at her sleeping baby, wild

blonde curls stuck out of the blanket, and the baby's soft hand was gripped tight to her collar. The man was called Pip and he was rather tall and lanky compared to her. Now was the chance all of them were waiting for; Eliza and Julio were waiting for a child, and Belinda and Pip were prepared to give them one.

“Quickly my love. We must hide her fast now that we are ahead of them,” whispered Belinda.

“All right. Where do you think will be a good place for them to find her?” Pip asked somberly.

“In the middle of the garden in a random spot. The woman, Eliza, knows the garden like the back of her hand. She will notice it is different immediately.”

“And you are sure they will care for her and love her as if she were their own?”

“Yes. I've watched them in the garden many a day. If they care for her half as much as this garden she will grow as strong and sweet as the garden itself,” Belinda reassured.

The two parents caught the sound of wheels in the distance and ran over to the middle of the garden. Pip immediately took a seed and dropped it on the ground. Hastily he put his hand in his pocket, took it out, then sprinkled something over the seed. The seed stood to attention and drilled itself into the ground. The sound of wheels was getting closer to them.

“Quickly! Quickly! They are almost upon us,” Belinda begged.

Pip's face twisted in a mixture of concentration and fear. He scrambled his hand back into the pocket and retrieved a glass bottle filled with a green liquid. He poured it over the soil and instantly leaves began to pop up and then a stem. Pip grabbed onto the

stem as it rose upward. At last a flower bud formed, then burst into a brilliant tulip. He stepped into the flower and sent down a basket on a rope. Belinda put the baby in the basket and grabbed onto the rope further up. Finally, they hid together in the flower and sat listening. A few seconds later, the sound of wheels and the clip clop of horses was just below them and the two parents held their breath. The wheels squeaked and a large thud resonated through the air. Was this the moment they would be caught? Would the full moon show their shadows in the flower? The two parents thought the worst. They heard a croaky voice below.

“Whar they gone to? Yo' said they went this hyar way, Sloan. As enny fool kin plainly see, they is not hyar. Wal whar is they?” croaked Gollin.

“Wal how is ah supposed t'know. Yo' knows jest as much as me,” Sloan said.

“Let's hoof it back then. I'm hunry as kin be. We kin search agin t'morrow,” said Gollin.

A door slammed shut and the galloping sped into the distance. Pip and Belinda sighed with relief and looked down at their daughter.

“There hasn't been a peep from her this whole time. It's like she knew to be quiet,” commented Belinda.

“She has always been a sound sleeper. Poor dear, can she ever know?” asked Pip softly.

“No. She won't know where she comes from and that's for the best. But at least she will know her name...my dear Thumbelina I wish there was a way to keep you.”

The blanket had been embroidered with the name “Thumbelina” in gold thread.

“She’ll be safe here and happy. And bring much joy to her parents,” Pip reassured.

“But we are her parents,” Belinda sobbed out.

Pip didn’t know what to say or do. He held his wife and cried with her. It was a desperate situation for sure. They were far from home, being hunted, and had to leave their child in the care of humans. Humans who couldn’t begin to understand the how and why of Thumbelina’s existence, but, as Pip and Belinda noted, it was a safe caring environment for their child and they had no other option. They laid down beside Thumbelina and watched over her all night. They didn’t want to miss their last moments with their daughter.

## Chapter 2

Eliza awoke to a sunbeam streaming through their bedroom window. She sighed and frowned thinking of last night’s conversation. She rose into a sitting position in the bed and squeezed her legs to her chest with her arms. Pots clanged in the kitchen. Julio was cooking breakfast and had let her sleep. Eliza swung her legs over the edge of the bed, put on fuzzy crocheted slippers, stood, and threw on her fluffy black robe. As she descended the stairs, the smell of vanilla and yeast caressed her nose. Once in the kitchen, Julio handed her a plate and put a pancake on it. It had a chocolate chip smiley face and she smiled back at it.

“Cheer up, chipmunk,” Julio said and kissed her cheek.

They went out to the garden, as usual, after breakfast. Belinda and Pip heard the door open from the apartment. Although they were weary, they moved quickly or else they would be seen. You see, dear reader, there was a law among the little people of the

natural world that humans must not see them. The only exception was individuals who were in grave danger, and even then they must not divulge any information about the little people. Thumbelina, if you have not already guessed, was indeed in danger and, being only a baby, had no information to give. Belinda and Pip spun down the stem of the tulip and ran under a bush in the garden. Safely hidden under the thick brush, they watched in anticipation. Would the couple find her, or would the parents have to reveal themselves in order to ask the humans to take their child? And if they did that, would the parents be breaking the law, or would they be found innocent due to the circumstances? All these thoughts flooded their minds.

Eliza and Julio observed that more flowers were opening. All the flowers were lovely, but one flower in particular stood out; a red and gold tulip.

“Did we plant a tulip?” he asked.

“No. We didn’t,” she replied.

“That’s weird. It must have been planted last year.”

“No, no. That has never been there. I’m sure of it.”

The two gazed at the flower, perplexed by its very existence in the garden.

“There’s a shadow in it. It’s moving a little, too. Maybe a little creature got stuck in there,” Julio said.

Both of them looked down into the flower and gasped in unison. They looked at each other with wide eyes.

Within the flower there was a tiny baby girl sleeping in a blanket. She wore a white nightgown and had a mop of curly blonde hair. She was very pale except for her rosy cheeks. Eliza carefully stuck her pointer finger into the flower and lightly touched

her head. Right after, the tiny girl yawned and her eyes opened wide. The happy couple smiled, realizing that their wish was finally granted. Julio picked up the blanket and had to squint to see the small embroidery. He sounded out a strange name:

“Thuhm-bell-leena” and then pronounced louder “Thumbelina! Eliza that’s what’s written here. I think it’s her name.”

“Well then...hello little one.” She said as she cupped the tiny baby in her palm, “We are your parents. I think we should call you Thumbelina,” Eliza said in a soft tone.

### Chapter 3

“Well...They found her, my dear. We can rest well knowing she is safe,” said Pip.

“Yes. She is safe now. But for us there is still more work to be done. We still need to get to safety,” Replied Belinda.

Despite her bravery, Pip could tell this journey had taken its toll on her. But dear reader, sometimes it is a dangerous thing to do what is right, and that is precisely why their family was put in danger in the first place. You see, despite their modest appearance, Pip and Belinda were known as leaders among the little people and, now that Thumbelina was safe, they would be returning to them.

“No sign of the carriage so far,” said Pip.

“Yes. Now seems like a better time than any to get moving.”

“Or rather flying,” said Pip.

Pip took out a small whistle and blew into it. At once, a woodpecker came down from a tree and swiftly landed near the two of them.

“Hello friends of Torrin. What can I do to help you?” the Woodpecker said.

“Hello. We need to get to a safe house immediately. We are being hunted by Gollin and his people. What can we call you, my friend?” said Pip.

“Gollin. What treacherous filth he is,” scoffed the woodpecker in disdain, and then he answered, “I am Wicker. There is a safe-house we use up in the tree-tops. You can stay there as long as you need or as long as it’s secret. These days there is no telling when Gollin’s followers will discover us,” Wicker said seriously.

“It has been much the same with us too. I need no safe-house myself, but my wife needs time to heal,” Pip explained.

“Goodness Pip. You act as if I am the first woman to have a child,” she said defensively, “Our people need--”

“--Please Bel,” Pip interjected, his voice cracking, “I have already lost one part of my family today. I can’t have you in danger too. I need you too much. Our people need you too. If you don’t heal and if you aren’t kept safe, who will be there for them?”

Belinda looked down, trembled, and replied, “I know. I just wish...I just wish a lot of things. Wicker, if you could please drop off my husband with our people after you take me to the house, I will be grateful and so will our people.”

“It will be my pleasure. Now hop on. Who knows when those slimy creatures will be back,” said Wicker.

They hopped on his back and, with a few long waves of his wings, he took to the air. Below they could see the apartment building getting smaller, and soon it was out of sight all together. The wind was now drying the tears off of their cheeks. Soon, they were at the safe-house: a large oak tree in the middle of a forest. The leaves were deep green

and thickly covered the top of the tree. A multitude of nests and bird houses covered the tree. Wicker alighted on a branch and Belinda stepped off of his wing.

“Pip, be careful.”

“I will be, my darling. I will be.”

The couple hugged. As Wicker flew away, Belinda waved to them as she wiped tears away with a handkerchief. She sighed and entered one of the bird houses through a door. She sat down on a rocking chair in the corner. She rocked slowly, looking down, eyes closed, and shook her head. She thought she heard the doorknob of the front door rattle, startled to attention, but it was just the wind. She took up a journal and a quill and started to write: “Dear Thumbelina, if you ever make your way back to our people, I hope this letter finds you. I’m sorry if you’ve felt lonely. We love you and didn’t want to give you up.”

#### Chapter 4

18 Years Later...

“Woohooo!” screamed Thumbelina.

The wind rushed through her hair. Her hands gripped the red maple leaf and she flew down through the air. A cricket on a leaf a little higher than she chirped in an alarmed manner as he flew down. As the ground grew ever closer, Thumbelina raised her arms so the leaf was parachuted above her. She floated down and light as a feather landed on the grass.

“Chirp, if you knew you would be afraid, then why did you jump on a leaf too?”

The cricket chirped back.

“Oh you are just like mother. Trying to keep me safe and telling me to stop being reckless. ‘Bel, stop climbing those rocks.’ ‘Bel, you can’t go in the pond.’ ‘Bel ...’”

Chirp gestured behind her.

“Bel!” a stern voice said.

“Yes, mom?”

Eliza wrinkled her nose and her hands were on her hips.

“Let me guess. You snuck out on Lily again?”

Lily was their golden retriever.

“Mom, I shouldn’t have to sneak out at all. I’m eighteen. I should be able to go outside whenever I want.”

Thumbelina had both hands in the air and then crossed her arms.

“Bel, you’re my only child. Please, think of me before you do something reckless.”

Eliza sat down on the ground. She opened her palm next to Thumbelina.

Thumbelina walked onto it.

“I do! And I will. But I shouldn’t have to beg you for your permission.”

Eliza brought her close to her face.

“I just love you. I want to keep you safe! If you want adventure and freedom then you can get it with me.”

Eliza’s eyes pleaded her case. Thumbelina frowned.

“I love you, too, but I need *real* freedom. Ever since Papa died...”

“Your dad would protect you, too, and bringing him up isn’t going to get you what you want.”

“It’s like talking to a wall with you. All you can think of is all the ways I can get hurt.”

“It doesn’t help that you seek out every possible way to get hurt. The amount of times I had to bandage cuts and scrapes. You sprained your ankle once...”

Thumbelina tuned her out. She didn’t want to hear the list of childhood injuries again.

“Thumbelina, you are staying with me, and that is final.”

“No! I need friends! Once you are gone, who will I have?! I’ll be alone!”

Thumbelina yelled.

Both of them fell silent for a moment. Then, all at once, Eliza sobbed.

Thumbelina frowned and rubbed the giant tear off her mom’s cheek. Birds twittered above them and flew off in a group. The sky filled with pink light, the sun an orange blaze. Thumbelina’s gaze rose to the vast sky.

“I’m sorry, Mom. But, don’t you ever wonder where I came from? Why I am so small? How did I end up in that flower? Everyone has someone like them but me.”

Eliza sighed and shook her head.

“You can’t leave. You just can’t.”

“But I need to find out who I am and where I come from!” said Thumbelina.

“This is where you come from!” Eliza said.

Thumbelina grabbed a leaf floating down next to her and parachuted to the ground. She ran away from her mother toward her favorite rock to sit on and cried for a good long time. She had trouble sleeping that night. Her dollhouse bed on the windowsill seemed smaller than normal. She stared out at the moon. Maybe tomorrow night she would leave.

She would spend the day preparing. But why not tonight? Yes, tonight! She sprung from her bed, slid down the curtains, and ran toward her backpack. She stuffed clothes, food in jars, and other supplies into it. Thumbelina changed into jeans, boots, a shirt, a sweater, and a puffy beige jacket. Her mom always said she looked like a toasted marshmallow while wearing it. She had to admit she was right. She walked down the hall to her mother's room.

“Lily,” Thumbelina whispered. Lily continued sleeping on her dog bed.

Thumbelina walked into the room. She tugged on Lily's ear.

“Lily, wake up,” she said. Lily raised her head and yawned.

“What is it?” Lily asked.

“I need to get outside,” Thumbelina said.

“Why?”

Thumbelina knew she couldn't tell the truth. Lily would never help her run away.

“Chirp is outside. And we forgot that it was supposed to get cold tonight. I'm going to bring him inside.”

“You and I know that Chirp came in with you. Tell me the truth.”

“Fine. I'm going to find where I came from.”

“So you're running away.”

“No. Well, yes. But for a good reason.”

“Well, I'm not helping you.”

“Lily, do you ever think about the future?”

“Not really, no.”

“Well, I do. And...what am I supposed to do when you and mom are gone? I won't have anywhere to go or anyone to spend time with.”

Lily sighed. Her head was laid down with her nose pointing toward Thumbelina.

“I understand. Okay, okay. But, just be careful out there. And try to be back soon.”

“I'll try my best.”

Thumbelina trotted up Lily's snout and nestled in her hair right behind her ears. Lily walked to the back door. Thumbelina walked across her back and slid down her tail. Lily took her front paws and pushed down the door handle. Thumbelina walked out the door and headed down the stairs. Lily let the door close and looked out through the window.

“Bye, Thumbelina. Please, come back to us.”

The air was cold on her face. The wind had picked up. Thumbelina headed out into the garden, and she set up her sleeping bag near a hole in the fence. She would exit the yard at the break of dawn. She fell into a deep sleep. A large round shadow loomed over her. Then, she was floating. An owl hooted and crickets chirped; a soft orchestration that only happened during the night. The wind sighed like her mother. Then, a sound of weeping floated and broke through the air. Then, it filled with gruesome snorting and guttural laughter. Thumbelina awoke to see bulging eyes and wide mouths on green faces.

## Chapter 5

Frogs! Thumbelina shuddered in both fear and coldness. She was dressed in only a scratchy burlap sack as a dress and her feet were completely bare. Her backpack was

gone. She was on a large lily pad. A frog stared at her, eyes wide with long eyelashes and bright blue eyeshadow. She wore a large gold necklace with big diamonds and a sparkly white dress. She raised Thumbelina's arm forcefully. Thumbelina tried to pull away but the frog tightened its grip.

"She's much too skinny. How will she lift anything?" the frog commented.

"She doesn't need to lift anything. If she can sweep a floor and cook meals then she is good enough for me," a second one said.

"Let go of me! What is happening? Who are you?" interjected Thumbelina.

"Quiet. You ugly creature," the second frog said.

"Yeah. We'll tell you when you can speak," the first frog said.

"Let's get Grot over here to ask him if he thinks she'd be a good servant," the second frog said.

The two frogs hopped in the water and swam off. Thumbelina felt lonelier than ever. Her poor mother would be frantic in the morning. A wave of guilt filled her to the brim. Her mother might think that Thumbelina hated her, and she regretted leaving the way she did. Thumbelina of course, loved her mother more than anything in the world. Did her mother deserve this? Furthermore, the thought of living with those cruel frogs and being unable to return home depressed her beyond hope. Thumbelina swallowed hard. She knew she couldn't risk swimming to the bank of the pond because she was not a strong swimmer. But she was a strong jumper and the lily pads were close together. Why not try to hop to the bank? Thumbelina arose, walked to the edge of the pad, and ran. She flew through the air, arms stretched wide. She landed on the next pad in a crouching position. She did the same act successfully a couple more times. In the

distance, she could hear the voices of the frogs returning. In a panic she forgot to do her start up run. Plop! She found herself submerged and unable to see. The underside of the lily pads were slimy on her skin. Her chest twinged, trying to push the air she was keeping in, out. Suddenly, something large pushed up under her. All at once it seemed, she landed on a lily pad. The air stole most of her warmth.

“Pssst.” a voice said.

“Who's there?” asked Thumbelina.

She wiped her eyes. A large orange fish was staring in her direction.

“Who are you?” Thumbelina asked.

“I'm Silvia.”

“Was that you? I've never seen a fish like you before.”

“Yes it was. You need to be more careful. I'm a Koi fish. The people who live in the house right over there take care of our pond,”

Silvia dived under the water a moment so she could breathe through her gills.

“but the frogs always bother us. The frogs are so noisy and they often steal our food.”

“That's very rude,” Thumbelina said.

“It is. Worst of all, they never lift a finger to do anything,” Silvia continued and ducked down for another breath.

“Instead they get others to be servants for them, which reminds me that we need to get you out of here. Hold onto the lily pad,” Silvia said.

Silvia swam below the surface of the water. Soon Thumbelina felt a jerk forward, and the lily pad was gliding through the water toward the shore of the pond. The white

lilies around her were so pristine that they glowed in the moonlight. Soon the lily pad was at the edge of the pond, and Thumbelina jumped off of it.

“You can get into the house through the dog door at the bottom of the back door,” Silvia informed her.

“Thank you so much. I wish there was some way to repay you,” Thumbelina replied.

“Maybe someday you can come back and visit. But quick now, Go!”

Thumbelina climbed up the hill of the embankment and ran as fast as she could toward the house. What for humans would be a short walk, was, for her, a much longer journey. The yellow dandelion heads on the lawn were above her head. When she was finally at the steps going up to the door, she had to sit down for a moment. Then, she heard the frogs in the distance coming back toward the pond, and she knew she had to hide. She climbed, with great effort, the first step and hid behind a potted ivy plant. She peeked her head out once the air fell silent and she saw that there was nobody around. She climbed the next two steps. The bricks were freezing and they felt rough on her hands, arms, and feet. At this point, Thumbelina was shivering intensely. Her fingers and toes were starting to feel numb. The wind picked up and made the leaves shudder on the trees. It made a whistling sound. One small step after another Thumbelina made her way toward the white doggy door. Her ears stung and it took great effort on her part to keep her eyes open. She did not see that one of the bricks in front of her stuck up a little and she tripped and fell over it. She tried to get up, but she wasn't strong enough. Thumbelina thought that this was it; she would freeze here and her mother would never know what happened to her. Everything seemed hopeless. Then she saw a large shadow

towering over her. Then she felt something touch her. It was wet and warm. Thumbelina heard a snuffling sound and felt breath. Oh no, this was worse. She would be eaten!

“Pobre chica,” mumbled the dog.

She relaxed realizing that it was a big dog nose sniffing her.

“Help,” she whispered.

The dog picked her up by the burlap dress using his teeth and carried her through the doggy door. Thumbelina felt a wave of warmth start to spread through her and she almost cried in relief. She gently swayed as the dog trotted over his bed. The dog lay down and dropped Thumbelina next to him.

“Buenas noches, niñita,” the dog whispered.

There was a nightlight plugged into the wall next to the bed and it revealed that the dog was a droopy old basset hound. Thumbelina couldn't help think about Lily back at home, who would always let her climb on her nose. Thumbelina curled up against the soft fur of the basset hound and fell into a deep sleep.

## Chapter 6

Thumbelina woke up and she was at first surprised by her surroundings but then remembered her misadventure last night. She was disappointed that it wasn't simply a nightmare. However, she also counted herself lucky because everything could have turned out much worse. Her arms were cold and she realized that the hound wasn't next to her. Where was he? Sounds of clanging and sizzling came from another room. The smell of green tea, eggs, and spices filled the air. Her stomach roared telling her to eat immediately. Thumbelina heard footsteps approaching, so she climbed out of the bed and hide behind it. A ceramic dog bowl sat beside the bed. A hand holding a plate deposited

half an omelet into the bowl. It had vegetables, cream cheese, cinnamon, and cumin in it. But before Thumbelina could make her move, the basset hound appeared. He did not touch his food, but she felt it would be rather rude to eat his food without asking, even if it was difficult to resist.

“Allegre, Sé un buen chico. Necesito ir.” said the woman.

She reached down and patted the dog on his head. When she heard a door close, Thumbelina emerged from behind the dog bed and said Allegre’s name to get his attention. His eyes brightened and he used his nose to push the bowl toward her.

“Thank you!” she said.

She ate happily and enjoyed the spicy sweetness of the omelet. It filled her up quickly. She stepped back to indicate that she was done. Allegre then ate the rest; it seemed to vanish in an instant.

“You’re welcome,” he said.

“Oh! You speak English too,” Thumbelina said.

“Yes. My other mother only speaks English to me, even though she speaks Japanese too.”

“You have two mothers?”

“Yeah. I love them. They cuddle me and give me belly rubs.”

“That’s nice. Oh no. My poor mother. She probably is frantic right now,” Thumbelina remembered.

“Did you run away?” Allegre asked.

“Yes,” she admitted, “But then I was kidnapped and you found me while I was trying to escape from them.”

“Oh. That explains why you are dressed like that. It seemed strange. Oh, I’m being rude. I never asked your name.”

Thumbelina told him her name and all about her mother and the fight they had. She told him how both of them went to bed angry at each other. He told her that it seemed like both of them were being too stubborn.

“But I need to know! I need to know if there are other small people like me,” Thumbelina said.

“Don’t you miss her now? And home now?”

“Yes. I do.”

“I can take you back if you want to go back,” said Allegre.

Back? Thumbelina’s mind raced with the different aspects of home: warmth, clothes, food, the garden, the leaves, Lily, Chirp, and her mother. But her imagination filled even more so with the future she might have somewhere with people like her. Maybe she could find her biological parents, make friends, have a job, fall in love, and start a family. Why couldn’t her mother identify with that? Why couldn’t she see that there was no future at home for her? No. She couldn’t give up that dream, but she would go back home, if only to settle her mother’s mind.

“Okay. I need supplies anyway, and I owe my mother an explanation,” said Thumbelina.

“We’ll have to wait until my mom comes home and takes me for a walk. Where do you live?”

Thumbelina told him.

“We pass right by there on the walk,” Allegre said.

A goofy smile spread over his face. In the late afternoon, Allegre and Thumbelina heard the front door close. Allegre ran over to his mother. His tail wagged like crazy.

He kept barking, “Hi! Mom! Hi! Mom! Mom! You’re home!”

Thumbelina giggled. She couldn’t help but think that he was a little foolish.

“Do you want to go out back?” his mom asked.

He went toward the doggy door but first stopped at his water bowl where Thumbelina was waiting behind his bed. She jumped and grabbed under his ear. He loped out the back door. His mother put a leash on him. The air held the pleasant aroma of wet earth. A chill swept up Thumbelina’s spine and she held tighter to Allegre. The skin of his ear was warm and it smelled like corn-chips. She could not see much, but quickly the grassy ground below turned to pavement. She rocked and bounced as he walked forward. She heard the clack of Allegre’s nails. His ear was silky, and this made it difficult to keep her grip. But Thumbelina could see that home was only a few houses down. It started to rain and Allegre’s ear became even slicker. Thumbelina felt her fingers slipping. Her eyes widened and then she was free-falling. She landed in, what seemed to her, a rapid river running down the street. Allegre pulled on the leash toward her but could not get to her in time. In a great waterfall, Thumbelina was swept down a storm drain. Water surrounded her. She could not see anything. Just as she felt almost unable to hold her breath, her head popped up above the surface. The water moved her still further through the black tunneling pipe. Thumbelina bobbed above and below the surface. She could not yell out because by the time she took a breath above the surface, down again she’d be pushed. She stuck her arms up in hopes of drawing attention, but she knew it was too dark for anyone to see her. It was by chance that a rat and his son were fishing for objects

on the ledge of the pipe system. Thumbelina felt something catch on the back of the burlap and she stopped.

## Chapter 7

“I think we caught something!” the rat child declared.

“Well, quick, reel it in.”

The boy did as his father said and up came Thumbelina. She gasped and flopped on the ledge. The rats gasped. Thumbelina wrung out the bottom of the burlap and her hair. She tried removing the hook but could not since it was attached to the middle of her back.

“Well, well, well. We’ve caught a live one,” the father said.

He chuckled and removed the hook from Thumbelina’s burlap sack dress. She was unsure how to take this. She was relieved to have the hook removed, but the words of the father sounded a little harsh. Or was he just being silly? Or was he intending to keep her as a prize? The boy stared at Thumbelina wide-eyed. His lips scrunched and his eyebrows furrowed. Thumbelina didn’t dare show her fear of the current situation.

“Father, she’s got no fur and her face ...it’s so ugly.”

Once Thumbelina had her wits about her, she stood up and addressed the rats.

“Who do you think you are? What’s so ugly about my face?”

Thumbelina’s eyes narrowed and her nose crinkled.

“I’m sorry m’lady. Don’t mind my son. He’s never seen a pixie.”

“A pixie,” Thumbelina whispered.

Thumbelina raised her hand to her now pale cheek. She had a word for what she was now. She had read about pixies in books but they all had wings. She didn’t. Was she

really a pixie? It felt surreal to think of herself as belonging to a race of people. She had thought of herself as a tiny human or a freak accident of nature or sprung from some strange magic. But she wasn't. She was a pixie. Thumbelina shivered. She was completely soaked and the autumn air was crisp.

“Are you okay?” the father rat asked.

He put his coat around her shoulders. His smile was sincere and calmed Thumbelina quite a bit. The soft fabric of his coat quickly warmed her. It was knit out of yarn made of the silkiest material she had ever felt.

“Better now but I'm still soaked,” she replied.

“I know! Let's get her to Marie. We can always fish for objects another day. She can give her some clothes too,” the boy rat said.

He stood taller as he said this and looked up at his father.

“Ah, yes. That's a good idea my boy. You will like Marie,” the father added.

As the three walked, the father told Thumbelina his name was Timothy and his son was Robby. She told them her name. Thumbelina explained what had happened to her. Timothy was confused.

“Wouldn't a window-sill be much too small for you to fit on?” he asked.

“Of course not. It's about six inches wide. It's much larger than I am,”  
Thumbelina said.

“But only humans have windows that big, silly. And you said you were home,”  
Robby said.

“I was home,” Thumbelina said.

“Do you mean you live with a human?” Timothy said.

“Well, yeah. My mother is human,” Thumbelina said.

Timothy and Robby stopped walking. They stared at her in wonder. Thumbelina kept walking for a bit but stopped and turned around once she realized they weren't beside her.

“What?” she asked.

Timothy and Robby looked at each other.

“Well, we've never heard of a pixie being raised by human before,” said Timothy.

“Oh. Also, don't pixies have wings?” asked Thumbelina.

“Not all of them. Some do. Some don't. The ones that tend the flowers in the trees have wings. But the pixies in the meadow don't have them,” said Timothy.

“I see. I must have come from the meadow,” Thumbelina said.

“It's rather strange explaining all this to you. You know so little about your own people,” said Timothy.

“Do you know where I can find them? My people?” Thumbelina asked.

She could feel her heart quicken in anticipation. This was it. This was what she needed. She stared intently at Timothy. He just shook his head and sighed. He frowned.

“Unfortunately, all of them have hidden since they escaped from the frogs. Nobody but a trusted few know where they live, and those few will never tell anyone their location,” he said.

“Oh,” Thumbelina said.

She felt heavy. Her eyes lowered. She understood now that it would be much more difficult to find others like her, but she was determined. She now knew that there were more people as small as her in the world. Soon they emerged from the pipe where

there was a stream and they side-stepped onto the bank of it. Thumbelina noticed that the stream, which to her was like a river, had all sorts of trash in it: coins, bottles, cans, plastic bags, and pieces of paper.

“Terrible isn’t it? Everyone used this stream for water in the past but then we realized it was getting more and more polluted. Now, we take the random objects, clean them, and use them for all sorts of things,” Timothy said.

“It’s just awful. My mom would always reuse things, recycle, and compost all she could. She would have been angry if I ever littered like this,” Thumbelina said.

“Unfortunately, not everyone thinks like that. Some people throw bottles or bags out their car windows. They simply don’t care enough about the environment,” said Timothy.

“Are we almost there? It’s getting dark. I’m scared,” said Robby.

He held his father’s hand and moved closer to him. His eyes darted to and fro, studying the shadows lengthening across the leaf-strewn forest floor.

“Don’t worry, Robby. Miss Marie’s house is just over that little hill. We will be there in no time,” said Timothy.

“That’s good,” said Thumbelina, “my toes are going numb.”

The mouse house was in a large tall stump. This wasn’t a rotten stump with worms, mites, and other squirmy unpleasant creatures. It was strong, intact, and clean. The stump had all its bark and the roots were thick. The pebble walkway was swept and the cushion of moss which served as grass was debris free as well. The front garden had multi-colored flowers and other plants *smaller* than Thumbelina. She wondered how that was possible. What magic was behind that? Yet, there was also ivy with emerald green

leaves, much larger than herself, spiraling up the house. The roof was thatched with straw tied together to a point at the top. A small chimney pipe stuck out from one side of the house and billowed smoke. It smelled like brown sugar, pepper, and something else Thumbelina could not identify.

“Yes! Her chili is my favorite,” said Robby.

He licked his lips and Thumbelina too felt her mouth start to water. She hadn’t had anything to eat since breakfast, and her stomach was very noisy because of it.

“She must have known we were coming somehow,” said Timothy.

“Oh. That’s the smell. Chili flakes,” Thumbelina said.

A mouse emerged from the round oak door and waved. She stopped and put her hand to her mouth when she saw Thumbelina. It seemed she was biting her nails.

“Don’t mention humans to Marie,” Timothy whispered.

“What? Why?” asked Thumbelina.

“She doesn’t like them,” replied Timothy.

How could someone dislike an entire race of people? It was true that some people were cruel to mice, but could a mouse be any better by being unkind back?

“Hello, Marie,” said Timothy, “How are you this evening?”

“Oh, I’m very well. Who is this lovely lady?” asked Marie.

“I’m Thumbelina. It’s nice to meet you,” she said.

“Oh poor dear. You must be freezing. Come in and get warm by the fire,” Marie said.

When Thumbelina entered the house, she noticed immediately a large bookcase filled with books and a round wooden table. On the table was a big pot with a ladle and

steaming biscuits on a plate. The light smell of honey next to the biscuits was intoxicating.

“I’ll fetch you something clean and dry to wear,” Marie said to Thumbelina.

Thumbelina sat on a cozy arm chair by the fire as Marie went into another room. She touched the spines of the thick books and a shiver went down hers when she saw the titles: “Cooking for company”, “An Encyclopedia of Plants”, “Practical Magic for the Home and Garden”, “Faerie Rules for Non-Faerie Folk”, and “The Harm of Humans”.

“M’lady, if anyone has information that can help you find your kind, it would be Marie,” said Timothy.

“I don’t think their location would be lying around a shelf,” Thumbelina said.

“You have to start somewhere and I wouldn’t dismiss the possibility. You would be surprised what secrets are hidden on the page,” he said.

Marie returned with a green dress. Thumbelina changed into it in another room. It certainly wasn’t what she would have picked, but it was clean and dry. The dress was a little big on her too but she liked it that way, it was more comfortable.

“Don’t you look nice,” Marie said.

Thumbelina smiled and thanked her for the compliment. But she didn’t care about how she looked, she only cared about the food on the table.

“Let’s eat!” said Robby.

“I hope there is enough,” Marie said.

They all sat at the table.

“Marie, you fret too much. There is always more than enough,” Timothy said.

They all ate until they were full, and after the chocolate-chip cookies Marie had in the oven came out, they ate these by the fire.

“Can you tell us a story, Thumbelina?” asked Robby.

“Yes, a story would be wonderful,” said Timothy.

“Okay,” said Thumbelina, “There was once a pixie named Julio.”

“Julio? That’s a strange name,” said Marie.

Thumbelina shifted in her chair but continued.

“Julio had a daughter named Belle. She loved listening to stories he would read to her before going to sleep. He also taught her how to bake and cook. Every morning, Belle would wake him up to go downstairs to the kitchen to cook breakfast together. But one morning, he didn’t wake up.”

“Was he cursed?” asked Robby.

“Shh. Let her tell it, Robby,” Timothy said.

“Um...yes. That is precisely what happened. The curse put him into a deep sleep. Belle and her mother were heartbroken and cried. But then a person knocked on their door. It was a friend who told them of a faraway tree. The flowers on the tree could break any curse. Belle and her mother were able to get to the tree, pick a flower, and have her father smell it before the curse set in forever.”

“I’m glad the curse was broken,” said Robby.

Thumbelina’s eyes glazed over in deep thought. That was not what happened at all. Julio was not a pixie. There was not a curse, but there was cancer. He was sick for a long time and then one morning, her mother could not wake him. Yes, that part was true, he did not wake up. And the reading, cooking, and breakfasts, those were true too.

“Are you okay, my dear?” asked Marie.

“Yes. I’m fine. I’m just tired.”

That night, when everyone went to bed, Thumbelina did not drift off to sleep right away. She thought of her father. She wondered what he would think of her now. He would want her to do something good, something brave, and something very *Thumbelina*. But she did not know what that could be.

## Chapter 8

Timothy and Robby left before Thumbelina woke up. In the morning, Thumbelina had tea and toast with Marie. Marie told her that she could stay until spring, as long as she helped with the household chores. Thumbelina told her that she would happily stay for that time.

Over the next week, she perused the books. She read about the various types of magic: potions, powders, oils, stones and crystals, and chants and songs with words she could not pronounce. There were spells to make things smaller or larger. There were blessings for different occasions. There was also a letter sending spell. Thumbelina was very excited when she found it. She could communicate with her mom and tell her she was okay. But upon reading further, she realized she would need a lock of her mother’s hair, which she did not have. Yet another disappointment.

“Thumbelina, don’t you tire of reading?” asked Marie.

“No, I don’t, Marie. All your books are so interesting.”

“I don’t know how that book is so interesting. You probably know most of the spells already.”

“Well, I didn’t grow up with magic.”

“That’s absurd. You’re a pixie. It’s a way of life for them.”

“Who said I grew up with pixies?”

“You didn’t?”

“I was adopted.”

“Oh, I see,” Marie said and glanced at the clock, “Oh my! Look at the time. It’s almost one o’clock. Mr. Vernon will be here soon.”

Marie often talked fondly of him to Thumbelina. Mr. Vernon was a mole and, like all moles, was blind. Marie described him as handsome and intelligent. She went to the mirror and smoothed her fur and blue dress. Thumbelina looked down at the loose yellow dress she was wearing and wrinkled her nose. She couldn’t climb anything in it, sit cross-legged or run, and most of all, she hated the color. It looked like dirty mustard.

“May I change into what you helped me sew?”

“I thought we agreed those clothes would be for Timothy. He can wear them while he’s doing his work,” Marie said, examining the sleeves of her dress.

“Please. They are so much more comfortable.”

“You must look nice for Mr. Vernon. With any luck he may grow very fond of you.”

“I don’t care about that. And this isn’t me anyhow. I’d rather wear clothes like Timothy and do handywork than be cooped up learning to sew, having tea, cooking, and cleaning. What type of life is that?”

“My life and you will learn to respect it and hopefully enjoy it. And must I remind you that I am the only thing between you and the freezing cold outside? If I wasn’t such a good mouse, you would be out there now. You are the most ungrateful child.”

“I’m not a child. And you aren’t my mother.”

“My house. My rules.”

They heard a knock from the door.

“We will discuss this later,” Marie stated.

She opened the door and greeted Mr. Vernon. They hugged and smiled. He was much taller than Marie. His dark brown fur was almost as dark as his black glasses. He wore a white shirt, grey vest, and pinstriped pants. He had a shiny black cane which he leaned against the coat rack.

“Thumbelina. Will you please set the table for tea,” Marie asked.

“Yes, Marie.”

Thumbelina did not want to be rude to Mr. Vernon. She also was quietly planning in her mind the process of leaving Marie’s house. Once the table was set and the hot water was poured onto the tea, Thumbelina sat down at the table. She waited to be introduced, but Marie and Mr. Vernon had already started talking about the pollution of the river.

“Stupid, selfish humans,” Marie said.

“They are absolute evil, I tell you. No respect for anything living besides themselves,” said Mr. Vernon.

“That is certainly true. My poor brother. He never hurt anyone. And then....smack; he was gone.”

“Yes. All of them are evil. Why I wouldn’t mind seeing each one gone, I tell you. Gone, gone--”

“Enough!” shouted Thumbelina.

She brought down her teacup with such force that it broke and tea was now spilling all over her dress and the floor.

“Thumbelina, have you gone mad?” asked Marie.

“So this is the girl you wrote to me about. The one who doesn’t know her place.”

“You’re right. I don’t know my place. I don’t know where I belong. It’s certainly not here,” Thumbelina said.

She went into the sewing room and grabbed the clothes they made for Timothy. She did feel bad about the clothes not going to him. Timothy had visited a lot and become a good friend. In fact, Thumbelina asked Marie if she could stay with him for a while. That was when Marie told her that Timothy and his son did not have a home. He was a handyman who wandered from place to place trading his services for room and board. Thumbelina had nowhere to go and no skills. She jotted up the stairs to the bedroom she stayed in, locked the door, and changed into the socks, boots, thick pants, shirt, sweater, and heavy winter jacket. There was also a hat, mittens, and scarf. It was such a warm and good outfit that she vowed to give it to Timothy if she saw him again. Would she? Marie was yelling at her through the door and jiggling the handle. Thumbelina ignored her and grabbed the matches from the nightstand and lit the candle next to her bed. She grabbed the candle by its metal handle, walked out of the bedroom, down the stairs, and slammed out the front door without a word. All at once, there was silence. Quiet, dark, and still. This was Winter.

Thumbelina’s feet crunched the frost covered leaves which she would have previously used to fly down through the air. But now all the trees were bare and the puddles, which were like a pond to her, were like glass. The hard, dry ground was

covered in a thin layer of snow. But Thumbelina had difficulty making out anything besides what was right in front of her. If it wasn't for the candle, she'd be in complete darkness. Thankfully, she was prepared for the cold this time, and she was relatively warm. But what about food? Water? Would it all be frozen? She could make fire at least. Yes, she could boil water. But in what? As she was pondering all this, she almost ran into something large. It was a woodpecker with shiny black and white feathers. The poor bird was lying on the ground.

“Oh poor woodpecker,” Thumbelina said as she bent down, “Frozen to death.”

But then she heard a faint sighing and the bird's chest rose slightly and fell.

“Not dead, but almost. I need to make a fire quickly.”

Thumbelina put down her candle and gathered the small twigs nearby to use as logs for a fire. She lit a match and lit the small bit of leaves for kindling. In her mind, she thanked her father for showing her how to start a fire.

“Maybe you'll need to do this yourself one day,” he said.

She remembered the glow on his warm brown face. His white teeth were extra shiny. His soft hazel eyes. Thumbelina noticed the bird shivered. It signaled life returning at least.

“You'll be okay,” she said.

Thumbelina took out a blanket and covered the bird. She stroked the silky feathers on its head. She sat in silence. The terrible conversation between Marie and Mr. Vernon flooded her mind. She understood why they hated humans. Humans certainly had faults, but many of them had a lot of good in them. Sometimes people didn't know any better. She wished she had said all this and defended her parents, but she wasn't sure they would

have listened. She kept the fire going, and when she couldn't keep her eyes open, she put out the candle, and she slipped under the blanket and snuggled into the feathers of the woodpecker. Although the bird wasn't awake yet, she could feel that he was warmer, and she knew her body heat would warm him further.

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