



The Empty Can

Completed by Marley Jenkins

Brianna was walking home from school when she saw an empty soda can on the ground. It was lying right next to a trash can. Brianna walked past it without throwing it away. She was in a rush to get home for her favorite TV show. The next morning, when she left her house for school, the can was outside her front door. When she bent down to pick it up, it rolled a few inches out of reach. Each time she tried to pick it up, it would roll away again. She looked around to see if one of her friends had tied a string to the can and was playing a trick on her. No one was around. She stared at the can for a moment. It then began to slowly roll toward her. When she bent down to pick it up, it once again rolled away. It was then that Brianna realized the can was trying to lead her somewhere. She bent down just enough to start the can rolling again and . . .

– The Dreamstarter Book

it started to twirl down an ordinary hill, very very steep, in San Francisco. The can then rolled into a dark, abandoned alleyway and disappeared into a sewer grate. Brianna turned away from the grate, laughing internally at herself for making herself late for school, just because of some old can that could have been rolling down the hills for no other reason than gravity. As she turned away from the grate and was almost into the pools of light that the early morning sun cast against the bustling street, a loud grinding sound, like the sound of clenched teeth rubbing, came from the grate.

The metal bars slid back to reveal a staircase that descended into the darkness. Curiosity ruling over all her other, smarter senses, Brianna took the first step that led her into the dark, musty sewer. Hearing the grinding noise again as the sewer grate closed above her, Brianna panicked and tried to open it, banging her fists and bloodying her knuckles, but to no avail.

After ten minutes of walking through the reeking tunnel, Brianna heard a clanking that sounded like a roar in the underground silence. She recognized the noise after a while to be the can thumping down one stair at a time, but

without her encouraging hand. She scuttled after it, registering in some part of her mind how silly and stupid it was to be using a can for a guide, but not caring what she was following, as long as she was doing something instead of the directionless meandering. Suddenly, the clanking was replaced by a rolling noise that could only be the can rolling along the ground.

She scampered after it, depending on it to lead her out of the sewer passage. The can suddenly stopped and, before Brianna could worry that her guide had halted, a sudden tremor shook under her feet as a door two times taller than she, opened up, spilling light across the floor, slicing through the darkness, temporarily blinding her.

After her eyes adjusted, she walked through the door into an enormous room, which was at least twice the size of her fairly large house. She stopped in her tracks. Her breathing hitched. She stared at the room. It wasn't the amazing size of the room that had stopped her, but the piles upon piles of trash that towered above her, almost touching the colossal ceiling. Gaining control of herself again, Brianna walked up to the pile of trash and examined it. After just seconds of looking, she had identified at least twenty different items like old socks, newspapers, and cans, similar to the one that had led her here. Garbage, trash, waste.

Suddenly, a door that blended in with the wall creaked open and a long shadow of a human was cast across the floor. Brianna froze for one second, then sprinted headlong behind a pile of trash just as a man emerged from the doorway.

Brianna watched as he opened up a panel of high-tech looking buttons camouflaged in the wall. He punched some, and a huge tube came down and started to suck the trash up, pile by pile. Brianna watched in horror as the tube came closer and closer to her sanctum. Making a snap decision, she jumped from the pile and tried to make a run for the door. Of course, the man saw her and used his long legs to sprint in front of the door before she could reach it, blocking her path. Brianna skidded to a halt and stared up at the man, eyes wide with fear. He looked down at her for a moment then demanded in a gruff voice, "Who are you?"

"Brianna" she replied, voice trembling

"How did you get here?"

"I followed a can here." She was sure he would think she was crazy.

But at that, his face softened and he said, "You are the chosen one?"

"Huh?"

"You tried to pick up the can, which shows that you are willing to help clean up our earth"

"I'm confused"

“Ok, that can is electronic and it was designed to find a person willing to help clean up the earth. Because you tried to pick it up, it led you here. It has a homing device that told it to come here. We are in an organization called C.E.N or Clean Earth Now. Many people don’t know how bad the pollution has become. There are many C.E.N organizations around the world, helping to clean up. This is the San Francisco C.E.N.”

“Oh, wow.” Brianna stuttered, “but I didn’t pick up the can at first, it followed me.”

“Well, its sensors probably detected that you were right for the job, so it followed you.”

“Um, what job am I right for?”

“Well, the reason we sent the can out in the first place was to find a leader, because our organization is quite unorganized.”

“Ok, but what would I do?”

“You would oversee our entire project, making sure that the trash would be picked up”

“But I have a life and school. Would I have to be down here full time?”

“No, we could set up something so that you could work from your house and not have to be here all the time, but you would have to come down every once in a while.”

“All right, but why do you have everything underground and secret?”

“Excellent, so you’re in?”

“Yeah, sure. It would be kinda cool to clean up the earth. But what about my question?”

“We keep this a secret because the main population would be very scared about what our earth is becoming, a waste dump. If we clean the earth up quickly and silently, then it would be easiest to not have to deal with the frightened people. So far, everything is going tremendously, except our organization issue, which has just been solved,” he explained with a grin.

“Ok, I get it. Um, can I tell my parents?”

“Sure, sure, you can even bring them down here if you like. We would want them to understand what you are doing.”

“Cool, what do you want me to do first?”

“You don’t have to do anything today, I’m sure it’s been a long day. You can come back tomorrow and we’ll get started.”

“All right, I am pretty tired.”

“As I assumed. You can use our more civilized exit that isn’t so dark and scary as the sewer grate; it’s right around this way.”

“Great, thanks.”

“No, thank you.”

And with that, Brianna headed up the staircase and sprinted home, not believing what she had just experienced. But the evidence was there, the stained clothes from diving into the trash pile. Wow, she thought, wow. As she was sprinting home, she passed a pile of old newspapers lying on the ground. She stooped over, picked them up, and tossed them in a trash can.