

My Brave Big Sister

A Story About Courage, Kindness, and Standing Up to Bullies



Please note: This is not the entire book, it's just an excerpt so you can see the quality of writing & design:

Chapter 1: My Hero in Pink



Eli liked mornings best when he got to walk into school with Maya.

She was only two grades ahead of him, but to Eli, that felt like a hundred.

Maya knew which teachers smiled before the bell. She knew which lunch line moved fastest. She knew how to open a sticky locker in one quick pull.

Most of all, Maya was never scared to say what she thought.

Eli wished he could be like that.

He walked beside her through the school doors, holding his backpack straps tight in both hands.

Kids hurried past them. Sneakers squeaked on the shiny floor. Someone laughed near the water fountain. A teacher called, "Good morning!" from the office.

Maya glanced down at him. "You're doing the nervous-squirrel thing again."

Eli blinked. "What nervous-squirrel thing?"

"You pull your backpack straps so hard, I think they might snap."

Eli let go a little. "I'm not nervous."

Maya lifted one eyebrow.

"Okay," Eli said. "Maybe a tiny bit."

Maya smiled. "You've got math first, right?"

He nodded.

“And then reading with Mrs. Bell?”

He nodded again.

Mrs. Bell was nice, but Eli still got a fluttery feeling in his stomach every morning. What if he read the wrong word out loud? What if everyone looked at him? What if his voice came out too squeaky?

Maya bumped his shoulder with hers. “You always make it through.”

“That doesn’t mean I like it.”

“That’s called being brave,” she said.

Eli frowned. “No, it isn’t.”

“Yes, it is.”

“Brave is when you fight dragons. Or jump into a river. Or stop robbers.”

Maya laughed. “Very common school problems.”

Eli tried not to smile, but he did anyway.

They reached the place where the hallway split in two. One way led to the younger grades. The other led to Maya’s class.

This was the part Eli liked least.

He looked down the long hallway to his room. It suddenly seemed farther away than usual.

Maya noticed.

She always noticed.

“Hey,” she said, crouching a little so they were eye to eye.
“What’s our deal?”

Eli knew this game. They had made it up when he was in kindergarten.

He held up one finger. “Head high.”

Maya held up one finger too. “Head high.”

“Kind heart,” Eli said.

“Kind heart.”

“Strong steps.”

“Strong steps.”

Now Maya held out her pinky. Eli hooked his around hers.

“And if I need you?” he asked softly.

Maya squeezed his finger once. “I’m still your big sister.”

That made the tight feeling in Eli’s chest loosen.

“Okay,” he said.

“Okay,” Maya echoed.

Then she stood and pointed down his hallway. “Strong steps, squirrel boy.”

“I am not a squirrel boy.”

“Hmm,” Maya said. “You’re right. Too fancy. Maybe Captain Squeaks?”

Eli groaned, but he was smiling when he turned away.

He took one step.

Then another.

Strong steps.

At his classroom door, Mrs. Bell greeted him with her usual bright voice. “Good morning, Eli.”

“Good morning,” he said.

He almost said it too quietly, but then he remembered Maya.

Head high.

So he tried again. “Good morning, Mrs. Bell.”

“That sounded strong,” she said.

Eli felt a tiny spark of pride.

Inside the classroom, he hung up his backpack and sat at his desk. His friend Nora waved from the next row. She had two yellow barrettes that looked like butterfly wings.

“Want to see my frog eraser?” she whispered.

Eli nodded.

Nora held up a green eraser shaped like a frog with big round eyes. Eli grinned.

“It’s cool,” he whispered back.

“I know,” Nora said. “I’m never using it. It’s too perfect.”

That made Eli laugh a little.

For a while, the day felt normal.

Math was not easy, but Eli got two answers right in a row. During reading, he stumbled over one long word, but Mrs. Bell helped him sound it out, and nobody laughed. At snack time, Nora traded him pretzels for apple slices.

Maybe, Eli thought, this would be a good day after all.

Later, when his class lined up to go to art, Eli felt calm enough to swing his arms as he walked. The hallway was full of bigger kids changing classes. Voices bounced off the walls.

Eli kept his eyes ahead.

Then he heard somebody snort.

Not a friendly laugh.

A sharp one.

He turned his head just a little.

A boy leaning near the lockers was watching him.

He had bright orange hair and a mean little smile, like he already knew a joke Eli didn’t.

Eli had seen him before. The boy was older. Third grade, maybe. He was usually with another kid who wore a backward red cap.

Today the red-cap kid was there too, arms crossed, watching.

Eli looked away fast.

“Keep moving, class,” said Mrs. Bell from the front of the line.

Eli obeyed, but the back of his neck felt hot.

When they reached the art room, he told himself it was nothing.

Maybe those boys were looking at someone else.

Maybe they always laughed like that.

Maybe he was being silly.

But all through art, while he colored the roof of a paper house bright blue, Eli kept thinking about that smirk near the lockers.

At lunch, he spotted Maya across the cafeteria with her friends. She was talking with her hands, telling some big story that made everyone at her table laugh.

She looked so sure of herself.

So easy.

Eli wanted to feel like that.

For one second, Maya glanced his way. She saw him and gave him a quick salute with her carrot stick.

Eli smiled back.

He didn't tell her about the older boys.

Not because it mattered.

Just because... it probably didn't.

After lunch came recess.

The sky was bright. The wind pushed soft clouds across the playground. Kids ran for the swings, the blacktop, and the monkey bars.

Eli liked the far side of the yard best, where there was a painted hopscotch path and a little patch of shade by the fence.

He and Nora were halfway through drawing a chalk town for toy animals when a ball rolled across their picture and smeared the chalk lines into dust.

Nora gasped. "Hey!"

A voice answered before Eli could.

"Oops."

Eli looked up.

The orange-haired boy stood a few feet away. The red-cap boy stood beside him, hands shoved into his hoodie pocket.

The ball rested near Eli's shoe.

The orange-haired boy grinned again. "Guess your little baby town got flattened."

Nora grabbed her chalk. "You ruined it."

“Then draw it again,” said the boy.

His voice sounded careless, but his eyes were fixed on Eli.

Eli’s fingers tightened around the yellow chalk in his hand.

Say something, he told himself.

Anything.

But his throat felt small and stuck.

The orange-haired boy tipped his head. “You don’t talk much, do you?”

Eli’s ears burned.

Before he could answer, the whistle blew for line-up.

The two older boys turned and jogged away like nothing had happened.

Nora stared after them. “They’re rude.”

Eli nodded, though his stomach had dropped hard.

He looked down at the ruined chalk drawing. The bright lines were gone, swept into a blurry mess.

For some reason, that made the whole thing feel worse.

Kids started forming lines by the doors. Eli and Nora brushed chalk off their hands and hurried over.

As Eli joined his class, he looked across the playground.

For a moment, he spotted Maya near the fourth-grade line.

She was laughing at something a friend said, one hand pushing back her long brown hair with the pink headband she wore almost every day.

Steady. Bright. Brave.

Eli looked away before she could notice his face.

Maybe it was nothing.

Maybe tomorrow would be normal again.

But as the classes began to file inside, Eli heard the orange-haired boy call to his friend in a voice meant to carry:

“See you later, Tiny.”

Eli froze.

He did not turn around.

He just stood there until Mrs. Bell gently touched his shoulder and said, “Come on, Eli.”

Then he walked inside with the class, head high if only on the outside, while one worried thought followed him down the hall.

How could tomorrow be normal now?

Chapter 2: The Boy by the Lockers



The next morning, Eli woke up thinking about one word.

Tiny.

He lay in bed for a moment, staring at the dinosaur sticker on his ceiling.

Usually he liked mornings.

Usually he liked the smell of toast from the kitchen and the sound of Maya singing off-key while she got ready for school.

But today his stomach felt strange.

Not sick.

Not exactly.

Just full of worry, like a balloon had been blown up inside him overnight.

He rolled onto his side and pulled his blanket up to his chin.

Maybe the orange-haired boy had only been joking.

Maybe he called everyone names.

Maybe he would not even remember Eli today.

From the hallway came Maya's voice.

"Mom! Where are my other socks?"

Their mother called back, "Where they always are!"

"In the drawer?"

"In the drawer!"

A second later Maya said, “Wow. This family is full of surprises.”

Eli smiled a little before he could stop himself.

That was the problem with Maya. She could make him laugh even when he did not feel much like laughing.

At breakfast, she slid into her chair wearing her pink headband and one blue sock and one striped sock.

“You’re mismatched,” Eli said.

“I call it fashion,” Maya replied.

Their mother set down a plate of toast. “I call it not looking carefully.”

Maya took a dramatic bite. “A true artist never explains herself.”

Eli gave a tiny laugh.

Maya pointed her toast at him. “There he is. I was wondering where my brother went.”

Eli shrugged and looked down at his cereal.

Maya chewed for a second, then tilted her head. “You okay?”

He nodded too fast. “Yep.”

She narrowed her eyes just a little, but then their mother reminded them to hurry or they would miss the first bell.

Eli was glad.

He was not ready to explain the tight knot in his chest.

The walk to school felt shorter than usual.

Maya talked about a science project. Eli listened, but only with half his brain. The other half kept scanning the sidewalk, the school doors, the windows, as if the orange-haired boy might appear anywhere.

Inside, the halls were already busy.

Lockers banged.

Shoes squeaked.

Voices bounced off the walls.

Maya noticed Eli's hands on his backpack straps again.

"Nervous-squirrel?"

"Maybe," he admitted.

She smiled and held up one finger. "Head high."

Eli sighed, but he played along. "Head high."

"Kind heart."

"Kind heart."

"Strong steps."

"Strong steps."

Maya bumped his shoulder. "See? You already know what to do."

That was nice to hear.

It just did not help very much.

At the hallway split, Maya gave him their pinky promise squeeze and headed off to her class.

Eli watched her go for one extra second.

Then he turned toward his own classroom.

Head high, he told himself.

Strong steps.

He made it all the way to his room without seeing the orange-haired boy.

That helped.

By the time math started, Eli almost believed yesterday had been a small, silly thing.

During calendar time, Mrs. Bell let him place the number card on the board. During writing, Nora passed him a folded scrap of paper with a drawing of her frog eraser wearing sunglasses. Eli snorted so suddenly that Mrs. Bell glanced over.

“Is your frog telling jokes again?” she asked.

Nora nodded solemnly. “Only good ones.”

Even Mrs. Bell smiled.

For a while, the day felt safe.

Then the class lined up for library.

Eli’s shoulders tensed the moment they stepped into the main hallway.

He did not want them to.

They just did.

He kept close behind Nora and tried to look at nothing except the floor tiles.

Blue tile. White tile. Blue tile. White tile.

Then a voice said, “Hey, Tiny.”

The word struck him like a tap on the back of the neck.

Not hard.

Still enough.

Eli looked up.

The orange-haired boy stood by the lockers again. Today he had one sneaker pressed against the wall and a smirk spread across his face.

The boy in the backward red cap stood beside him, chewing on the end of a hoodie string.

A taller girl passing by said, “Braden, move. You’re blocking my locker.”

So that was his name.

Braden.

He stepped aside for the girl, then looked right back at Eli.

“Didn’t hear me?” Braden asked.

Mrs. Bell was at the front of the line, leading the class toward the library doors. Other kids were talking. Nobody else seemed to notice.

Or maybe they noticed and did not know what to do.

Eli kept walking.

That was all.

He just kept walking.

Braden laughed softly. "Guess Tiny's too tiny to talk."

The boy in the red cap chuckled.

Heat rushed into Eli's face. He stared forward so hard his eyes watered.

Next to him, Nora whispered, "Do you know them?"

Eli shook his head once.

She frowned, but there was no time to say more. They had reached the library.

Inside, everything smelled like paper and dust and clean carpet. Mrs. Bell told them to choose one book for silent reading and one book to check out.

Usually library was Eli's favorite.

Today he walked past the animal stories and the shelf with the shark books and the funny comics, but nothing felt fun.

He chose a book about storms because the cover showed a giant gray cloud spinning over the ocean. It matched the feeling in his stomach.

When the class sat in a circle for story time, Mrs. Bell read aloud in a calm, cozy voice. Eli usually loved that voice.

Today he heard almost none of it.

Tiny.

The word kept rolling around in his head.

It was such a small word.

Why did it feel so big?

After library came lunch.

Eli carried his tray to his table and saw Maya across the cafeteria again. She was laughing with two friends, breaking her sandwich into neat squares like she always did.

He could tell her.

He could wave her over. He could say, There's this boy named Braden, and I don't like the way he looks at me, and he keeps calling me Tiny, and I wish it would stop.

He pictured Maya's face getting fierce.

He pictured her marching across the cafeteria.

He pictured Braden laughing at him even more after that.

Eli looked down at his mashed potatoes.

He did not wave.

Nora sat across from him. "That orange-haired kid in the hall was weird."

Eli poked one potato lump until it broke apart. “Maybe.”

“He was talking to you.”

“Only a little.”

Nora wrinkled her nose. “Only a little rude is still rude.”

Eli almost smiled.

Nora was small, but she talked like she had her own tiny judge’s hammer hidden in her desk.

She lowered her voice. “Do you want me to tell Mrs. Bell?”

The thought made Eli sit up straighter. “No.”

Nora blinked. “Why not?”

Because then it would be real, Eli thought.

Because then people would know.

Because if adults stepped in too soon and Braden got mad, what would happen next?

He did not know how to explain all that.

So he just said, “I don’t want to make a big deal.”

Nora studied him for a moment. Then she nodded once.

“Okay. But I still think he’s a stink bug.”

That earned a real smile.

“A giant stink bug,” Eli said.

“Exactly.”

After lunch, the class headed back toward their room.

This time Eli stayed in the middle of the line.

Not at the front.

Not at the back.

Middle felt safer.

For a few minutes, it worked.

Then, when the line slowed near the drinking fountain, something brushed his elbow.

He looked down.

A crumpled piece of paper had landed against his shoe.

No one else seemed to notice.

Eli bent quickly and scooped it up before Mrs. Bell could tell him to keep moving. He slipped it into his pocket without opening it.

His heart beat faster all through spelling.

He waited until independent work time, when Mrs. Bell was helping another student across the room. Then he opened the paper under his desk.

It had only two words, written in thick, messy pencil.

SO SMALL

There was a crooked little drawing under it.

A stick figure the size of a thumb.

Eli stared at the note until the letters blurred.

He folded it up again so fast the paper almost tore.

He knew, suddenly and completely, that this was not a joke that would float away.

Braden wanted him to feel small.

And somehow that made Eli feel smaller than he already had.

The rest of the afternoon dragged.

When the final bell rang, the classroom burst into motion. Zippers zipped. Chairs scraped. Kids called good-bye.

Eli shoved the note deep into the front pocket of his backpack.

He did not know why he kept it.

Maybe because throwing it away would not throw away the feeling.

Maybe because some part of him wanted proof that it had happened.

In the hallway outside, Maya was waiting by the wall, swinging her lunch bag.

“There you are,” she said. “Took you forever.”

Eli nodded.

She fell into step beside him. “Want to hear something amazing? Devon tried to glue his volcano together before the paint dried, and now it looks like a lumpy tomato mountain.”

Eli made the right sound. “Huh.”

Maya looked sideways at him.

Not long.

Just long enough.

“You sure you’re okay?”

He forced a shrug. “I’m tired.”

“That, I believe.”

They walked through the front doors into the afternoon sun.

For a moment, Eli thought maybe he had made it.

Maybe Braden stayed inside for later grades.

Maybe the day was over.

Then a voice drifted from behind them.

“Bye, Tiny.”

Eli stopped.

Not for long.

Just one tiny pause.

But it was enough.

Maya glanced back. “Did someone say something?”

Eli swallowed. His backpack suddenly felt heavy as a rock.

“No,” he said.

Maya kept walking.

Eli followed her, but he could feel the lie sitting between his ribs, hot and uncomfortable.

Behind them came a short laugh.

Not loud.

Confident.

As if Braden already knew Eli would say nothing.

Eli kept his eyes on the sidewalk all the way home.

And for the first time, he wondered a frightening thing.

What if being quiet was exactly what Braden wanted?