

UPSIDE★DOWN MAGIC

STICKS & STONES

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1

When Nory Horace turned into a koat, she had the body of a black kitten and the head of a tiny goat. She could jump from the floor to the kitchen counter. She could root through the laundry and nibble on yummy socks. She was good at chasing butterflies.

Her koat was a pretty awesome animal, actually, but Nory's aunt Margo didn't like it.

Koat-Nory ate Aunt Margo's flowers.

And her carpets.

And, of course, her socks.

Yesterday morning, Koat-Nory ate all the Fruity Doodles breakfast cereal, plus the box it came in.

Plus the tablecloth, two loaves of bread, and a part of Aunt Margo's couch.

Nory was a Fluxer. Her magic talent was that she could change into animals. But most Fluxers transformed into ordinary creatures like cats and dogs and rabbits. Nory was different. She *could* become ordinary animals . . . but they didn't stay ordinary for very long.

Aunt Margo had specifically asked Nory not to flux into a koat today, because Margo's boyfriend, Figs, was coming over for dinner and Margo wanted the place to stay clean. Also, kids weren't supposed to do magic without supervision until they grew up and got licensed. (As if anyone followed *that* rule.)

Nory loved Aunt Margo and didn't want to let her down. She planned to stay in plain old girl form. Brown skin, bright eyes, big hair, lucky purple jeans, new red sneakers.

Aunt Margo had left early for her taxi job, so Nory was alone. She was standing on the porch of Margo's small clapboard house in the town of Dunwiddle, waiting for her friend Elliott. She figured this way, even if she did flux into a koat by accident, the house would stay clean.

Nory and Elliott usually walked to school together.

But today turned out to be different. Today, Elliott was late.

Nory noticed a butterfly flapping overhead and wondered if she could change into a koat really quickly and then change back. It felt so *good* to chase a butterfly as a koat.

No, no, no, Nory told herself. *No koat this morning. No unsupervised fluxing.*

The butterfly fluttered above her face.

No, no, no koat! Don't flux!

As with most people, Nory's magic had bubbled up when she was ten. Before that, she'd gone to ordinary school, as everyone else did. Starting in fifth grade, kids went to magic school.

Her new school, Dunwiddle, was a public magic school. That meant anyone could go there, unlike the private academies, which were expensive and hard to get into. Dunwiddle offered classes like math and literature and gym, as well as standard magic classes for the five categories of regular magic students—Flyers, Flares, Fluxers, Fuzzies, and Flickers. Flyers flew. Flares had fire magic. Fluxers turned into animals. Fuzzies could communicate with animals. Flickers could become invisible or turn other things invisible.

But not every kid had regular magic. Nory didn't, for example. So there was a problem for schools: Where should they put the students whose magic was unusual?

As an answer, Dunwiddle had started offering a new class. It was called Upside-Down Magic. Nory's father had sent Nory to live with her aunt just so she could be in it. There were seven other fifth-grade kids in the class. Like Nory, all of them had something wonky about their talent. Only they weren't

supposed to say *wonky*. Their teacher, Ms. Starr, wanted everyone to say *different* or *unusual* instead.

Nory wished the kids in the regular classes would follow that rule, but most of them didn't. Lots of them called the UDM kids *wonky*. Or they called them *Flops*. A group of fifth-grade *Flares* were the worst. They called themselves the *Sparkies*, and they teased the UDM kids as much as possible. "Look, there's that *wonko* who turned into a *skunkephant* and smelled up the whole cafeteria," they told anyone who would listen.

(And, yes, Nory *had* turned into a skunk-elephant earlier in the year. She *had* smelled up the whole cafeteria. But did the *Sparkies* need to rub it in? *No.*)

Nory bounced on her toes. She turned her head from right to left, searching for Elliott. Instead, she spotted a skinny dark-haired boy skidding around the street corner and running her way. He was flushed and sweaty. He wore a baseball cap and a navy shirt with white lettering that read CIDER

CUP POLICE SQUAD. It was Bax Kapoor, another UDM kid.

“You’re going to be late!” Bax called as he dashed by. *Yikes*. He was right.

“Hey, wait!” Nory called, sprinting after him. Bax looked over his shoulder but kept going. Then, *whoa!*

His feet flew up. His head whipped forward, his arms windmilled, and he went down hard.

BAM!

Nory cringed and slapped her hand over her eyes. She peeked through her fingers, already knowing what she would see.

Yep, Bax had turned into a rock.

That was his upside-down magic. Bax was a Fluxer, but he didn’t flux into animals. He fluxed into a rock. He did it every day, and pretty much never on purpose. Always he turned into the same enormous gray rock. Well, once he’d fluxed into a leash, but that was an exception. Every other time? Enormous. Gray. Rock.

Nory raced over. “Bax! Are you all right?”

She was met with silence, since Rock-Bax couldn’t talk. Also, Rock-Bax couldn’t flux back, which made Nory feel really bad for him. It would be dreadful, she thought, to flux into a rock—with no mouth, no arms, no ears—and to be *stuck* like that. For him to change back, somebody had to take him to the nurse’s office for an icky green potion that did the trick.

Nory’s shoulders sagged. Today, she would have to be that somebody.

They were both going to be *really* late for school.