The Boy on CINNAMON STREET

By PHOEBE STONE



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To David, who rescued me.

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Summary: Since a tragedy she cannot remember, thirteen-year-old Louise has changed her name, given up gymnastics, moved in with her grandparents, and locked

her feelings inside but through her friends Reni and Hen and notes from a secret

admirer she begins to find herself again.

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Prologue

My name used to be Louise but it's not anymore. I had a T-shirt made that says across the front NO LONGER LOUISE. I changed my name because Louise rhymes with cheese and fleas and sneeze. So now I'm Thumbelina. I know. I know. It's over the top. It's unrealistic. It's childish and stupid. Nobody has that name. But the thing is, I'm little. I'm only four feet seven and I'm in seventh grade. This means I have a seventh-grade soul that's stuck in a fourth-grade body. This is major annoying. I'm planning on growing taller soon. I came up with the idea of Thumbelina when I was walking along the river with my friend Henderson. He was looking at the sky. Henderson always looks at the sky when he's thinking and he's *always* thinking. He was saying, "Actually everybody has a story, a fairy tale in their heart that they adhere to. That's why Hans Christian Andersen is so awesome."

"Adhere to?" I said. This is the way this kid talks, seriously. Then I started looking up at the sky with Henderson. He's very tall and I'm very small, and people started honking at us because it looked like we might wander into the half-frozen river by mistake. But while I was cloud watching with Henderson, it came to me. I "adhere to" the story of Thumbelina.

That was around the time in my life that things started shifting, like slabs of ice on a river. It all began with a very very snowy winter and a pizza I ordered after my grandma had a yard sale. I think of that pizza now as a cosmic wheel spinning through the universe, changing everything.

Chapter One

Through the window, I can see South Pottsboro is frozen solid. It's icy and windy out there. In this case the word *south* is misleading. I don't see any palm trees. *Dumpy, boring* Pottsboro would be more accurate. There's another snowstorm on the way and my grandma is having an indoor yard sale in the foyer of our condo building. A yard sale during a snowstorm?

My grandma is like, "Blah blah blah. We're the first people this season to have a sale. We'll be swamped." My grandpa is all huffy because he doesn't want to put his slippers in the yard sale. He's wearing them to keep them safe, which is totally embarrassing because these slippers look like roadkill. Seriously.

And the lady downstairs already has plenty against my grandpa because he does noisy limbering-up exercises in our living room and then that lady starts pounding on our door. My grandma is very two-faced at these times. She's so sweet to that lady then, but later, in the middle of the night, I can hear my grandma and grandpa laughing and giggling and calling her a big jerk.

In the middle of the night through the walls, I hear my grandma and grandpa talking about other things too. Sometimes they aren't giggling. They're talking about me. Sometimes my grandma starts sobbing and my grandpa goes, "Baby doll, give her a little time. She just needs more time. Relax. Relax." And then the room goes stone silent like they both died in there.

Right now my grandpa and I are going outside to the steps to put up a flyer on the glass front door. It says YARD SALE TODAY: EXERCISE BICYCLE, DISHES, BOOKS, AND A BALANCE BEAM. Okay. The balance beam is mine. I used to be in gymnastics until about a month ago. Okay. It used to be my life. I spent a million hours a week on that balance beam. I lived on that freaking beam. But it was my idea to sell it.

It's cold out here. My grandpa's scarf (which he calls a muffler) blows around. My grandpa blows around in the wind. When he leans over, a silver letter opener falls out of his pocket onto the snow. "Hey," says my grandpa, "nobody was gonna buy a letter opener anyway. Nobody writes real letters anymore. Right, pal?"

"Whatever, Grandpa," I say. Right now I would like to do a cartwheel, but I don't. This cartwheel feeling wells up in me constantly, the same way my breath comes up out of me. I used to do cartwheels like the way other people say yes or no. Cartwheels used to *be* my yes and my no. From here I can see my balance beam. It's lying there waiting for me to run toward it, waiting for my handsprings and my double twists. I turn away. My grandma was like, "Are you sure you want to sell this, Louise?" I didn't answer her. Henderson says that hikers freezing to death on Mount Everest don't feel a thing. He says they think they're falling asleep next to a warm fire when actually they're lying in a snowbank, their body temperatures dropping to below zero while they are slowly becoming blocks of ice.

Soon enough the front doors open and a whole herd of revved-up South Pottsboro shoppers pour in. "Bingo!" says my grandma, twinkling at all the customers milling around. I swear my grandma stepped out of *The Wizard of Oz*. This includes the Munchkin vocabulary.

"She's a pro. Your grandma's no space cadet, that's for sure," says my grandpa, swinging his arms around.

Now people start picking up things: my grandpa's ripped magazines, my grandma's sweaters, beat-up rusty pots and pans. There's a row of old shoes under the table and in the lineup I see a pair of my mom's. They're kind of worn to the side and you can see where her toes rested against the soft leather. They're sky blue and each shoe carries with it the shape of my mom's foot and the whole shift and feel of her weight. A little girl is jumping around holding them now because she wants them for her dress-up box. "Okay," says the lady with her. "We'll buy them." When the lady hands my grandma two dollars, my grandma looks down. Her face gets lost and blurry and she holds the shoes in her hands for just a second too long.

I look up now and Mrs. Stevenson is sitting on my balance beam. She's Terry Stevenson's mom. "Sold," she says, glaring at some man who is walking by. "Sold," she says again when he turns around. "How much is the balance beam?" she calls out. "I'd like to buy it for my daughter. You're not part of the team anymore, Louise?" She looks over at me with a blank smiling face, the kind of empty, almost hurt smile other people's mothers always give you, as if they cannot bear to give any part of a real smile to anybody but their own child. I don't answer. I don't feel like answering anybody today.

My balance beam is one of the first things to sell, but it is one of the last things to leave. It sits in the foyer late into the afternoon. Then the snowstorm gets worse and the electricity goes out and it's all shadowy and dark down there. Then it's a good thing that beam is pushed off to the side because anybody could stumble over it in the dark and really get hurt. You could tell how much Mrs. Stevenson wanted that beam because she sends over four high school kids to get it during the worst part of the storm.