

The Liberation of Elena Bastille

By Irene V. Thomas

Once upon a time in a land called Bestia, animals of every order ruled the world. At the time of the human empire centuries before, a white lion named Samuel had stumbled upon an enchanted pool. Every sip increased his size times five and his intelligence times ten. News of this magical water spread throughout the animal kingdom, until every beast of the land had taken a sip. This led to the overthrow and enslavement of the human race. Life had been this way for many centuries, and every whiff of rebellion had been quashed.

Among the enslaved class lived a beautiful orphan girl named Elena. When she was only six a family of rats had bought her from an auction, and she lived with them in a squalid house where she was forced to clean, cook, and groom the disgusting rodents. There were two married rats named Hester and Boris. Hester's brother Augustus lived with them eleven months out of the year and spent one month a year at a training camp for overweight rodents.

Elena had one friend in whom she confided everything she struggled with and hoped for. This friend was a crow named Henry, who had once been a human school teacher. He had been transformed into this bird by an evil sorceress guinea pig named Eugenia, for making fun of her large teeth. Henry lived in a crawlspace under Boris's toolshed. Not being frequented by the rats, Henry lived there safely in secret.

"Where is my flat iron Elena!? I know you stole it, you wretch! You think I don't notice you constantly staring at my beautiful locks? You can't just iron in beauty like this!" Hester inaudibly snapped while sucking and spitting out sunflower seeds all over the floor. Elena's piercing blue eyes, curly auburn hair, and soft tan skin in contrast with Hester's beady black eyes, matted flea-infested fur, and indescribably hideous hide made Hester mad with jealousy. Elena could not escape these harassments and responded as a servant would with a simple, "I'm sorry I will make sure they are returned to their proper place."

"You better, or you'll have to go without a meal today! While you're at it, Boris says there was no mail, but I know he's lost it; find that too."

"Yes Hester." Elena submissively replied.

"Now! Uh, the incompetence."

Hester hadn't spoken a kind word since she had persuaded Boris to marry her.

Elena found the flat iron beneath Hester and Boris's bed, but she didn't see the mail anywhere. "Hmm. I've looked everywhere, the parlor, the den, the kitchen, and even in the spaces between the floorboards. Where could it be?" Discouraged, Elena sulked out to her secret treehouse in the woods where she intended to have

a good cry. Before she could let out her first wail, Henry swooped down onto his perch and joyfully cawed, “What’s the matter, Ellie? Haven’t you heard the good news?”

“What good news could there possibly be? My life is wretched. All that I eat is a few bread crusts and watered down soup everyday. My only friend is an obnoxious bird, my family is dead, and I live under a house ruled by a rodent matriarchy!” Elena stuttered this through choked sobs.

“Even though you’ve insulted me, I’m such a good friend that I’ll still tell you the fantastically wonderful out of this world good news!”

“I might as well listen, to humor you.” Elena said rather saltily.

“I will ignore the attitude and tell you. You are eighteen correct? Which means you are eligible to compete in the games this year.” Henry stated with an air of importance.

“That’s the news? I already knew my age, and anyone not living under a rock would know you have to be invited to compete! Please, tell me you have something better to lift my spirits with.”

“Oh I do. Early this morning I caught Augustus skulking out to the mailbox to steal Boris’s *Buff Rodent Magazine*. As usual, I was trying to peck his eyes out when I noticed a letter with the golden Animal Council insignia printed on top. He tripped on a rock and dropped all the mail in the pond, but I salvaged the letter.”

With a sly grin Henry pulled out a rectangular shape from his pocket. In addition to the gold insignia the letter had the name “Elena Bastille” printed on the front. Henry slipped out the enclosed paper and read,

“Dear Elena Bastille slave of the Rodentus clan,

You are cordially invited to compete in our annual freedom games. The winner of the games will be granted freedom and safe passage to the unknown islands. You will be allowed three days to enter competition at Animal Council HeadQuarters. Master permission and knowledge is recommended but not mandatory.

Thank you and good luck,

Amelia Catissen,

Animal Council Administrator”

Elena nearly fainted with excitement, but then recalled the two hundred mile journey to Animal Council Headquarters and the three days time restriction. “Oh, Henry. there is no time to waste! We must leave tonight.”

This being an extraordinary situation, Elena could legally leave without Hester and Boris's knowledge. She finished her chores early and made her excuses to turn in. "Get a good sleep tonight, because you're shaving my beard tomorrow and it might be a twelve hour venture." Borsi chortled. Disgusted but relieved, Elena strode back to her room where she frantically gathered her things.

All set for the journey, she strapped her bag across her back and crept out the window to the toolshed. "Henry!" She hoarsely whispered. "Henry! Are you ready?" Henry leapt out the window squeaking.

"Here I am!" "Shhh! They'll hear you!" They snuck behind the toolshed where Elena kept a makeshift bike she had crafted from scrap metal. "I'll fly ahead of you and make sure the coast is clear." Elena jumped on her bike and pedaled down the dirt path to the road. She had never ridden the bike on a flat stretch, only in circles beneath her treehouse. She wobbled for a bit, but eventually hit stride. The October wind slapped her in the face, a metal shard on the bike poked her calf, and the leather straps of the heavy bag dug into her back till she bled, but she couldn't have cared less. She'd never been so close to freedom her whole life.

It was roughly a day's journey by bike, so Elena decided to stop at the Inn of the next town for a rest. Pigton was a miserable town infested with thieves, murderers, and vagabonds. Once she hid the bike under leaves in the woods, she cautiously stepped inside the Inn. There were drunken pigs as far as the eye could see. Pink curly tailed piglets fell off their stools, brown bushy browed boars yelled, "Chug, chug, chug," and one uncommonly large sow handed out drinks behind the bar. Knowing this was far too dangerous for a fugitive, human slave girl, she resolved to sleep in an abandoned warehouse fifty yards from the Inn.

By the light of the moon Henry spotted the bike under the leaves as he flew by. He searched and finally found Elena sleeping next to the warehouse. He perched next to her and they both slept till morning.

"Elena, wake up!" Henry squawked. "There are three huge boars coming this way!"

Elena jumped up and ran for the woods, but the boars had already spotted them. They chased after them looking for a quick meal. "Come on faster! We're almost there!"

Elena scrambled for the bike and got on racing down the road as fast as she could. Henry flew back to create some distance between Elena and their aggressors. "Take that! And that!" Clawing and pecking at the beasts Henry slowed them down, but one especially quick boar swatted Henry to the ground and crushed him with one foul blow.

Elena pedaled nonstop until she lost control of the bike and flew into a ditch by the side of the road. Breathing heavily she looked down at her scraped knees, then down the road from where she had come, and began to laugh. “We lost them, Henry! Wow, I’ve never felt so excited and alive! Henry?” She looked around but the crow was nowhere in sight.

She cupped her hands around her mouth and bellowed, “Henry! Henry where are you?” Suddenly, she realized he hadn’t flown ahead, and must still be back in the town. “I must go back!” Grabbing her bike she raced back faster than she had come. Wanting to make sure not to be seen she dropped the bike half way back and walked the rest of the way. About thirty yards away she spotted a black figure lying limp on the road. Elena burst into tears, but daring not to come any closer she fled the scene.

As she rode away a terrible pain came into her chest, like she couldn't breathe, and panic struck her heart. She couldn't think of mourning, because grief would overtake her. Only one thought was in her head now, freedom. “I must win my freedom. I must win my freedom. I must win my freedom.” She repeated this mantra over and over until no other words entered her mind.

At last, she reached the Headquarters. Determination overpowered her devastation. She strode in, smacked her invitation letter on the secretary's desk, and demanded, “Sign me up!”