

The Little Book of Courage



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Ella was seven years old, with light brown skin and wavy dark brown hair that always escaped from her ponytail. She had big hazel eyes and a small gap-toothed smile. One sunny Saturday, her grandfather came to visit. He walked with a wooden stick and wore his green wool cardigan. In his hand, he held a small brown notebook. "This is for you, Ella," he said, his crinkly eyes twinkling.



Ella took the notebook and opened it. Every page was blank. "It's a special notebook," Grandfather said, adjusting his round glasses. "Whenever you are brave, a new picture will appear on its pages." Ella frowned. "But I'm not brave," she whispered. Grandfather smiled. "You'll see," he said. "Courage comes in small steps." Ella hugged the notebook close. She wondered what kind of picture might appear.



On Monday, Ella sat in class, clutching her notebook. Mrs. Penny, with her black bun and blue dress, asked the students to share something about their weekend. Ella's heart beat fast. She wanted to speak, but her words felt stuck. Then she remembered Grandfather's words. She took a deep breath and raised her hand. "I got a notebook," she said softly. When she opened it later, a tiny drawing of a raised hand had appeared!



At recess, Ella watched the other children play. A girl with a long braid waved at her. Ella wanted to wave back but felt shy. She looked at her notebook and thought of the raised hand picture. Taking a small step, she walked over. "Hi, I'm Ella," she said. The girl smiled. "I'm Mia!" They played together until the bell rang. That afternoon, a new picture showed two girls holding hands. Ella smiled.



The next week, Mrs. Penny asked for a volunteer to read a sentence on the board. Ella's stomach flip-flopped. She remembered the hand and the friend. Slowly, she raised her hand again. Mrs. Penny called her name. Ella stood up and read the sentence, her voice growing stronger. Her classmates clapped. When she sat down, she opened her notebook. A drawing of a girl reading aloud appeared. Ella felt proud.



On Saturday, Grandfather took Ella to the swimming pool. She had never learned to swim and felt scared of the water. "I'll be right here," Grandfather said. Ella dipped her toes in. The water was cool. She thought of her notebook. Taking a deep breath, she stepped into the shallow end. She held onto the wall and kicked her legs. A new picture appeared: a girl with a floatie. Ella giggled.



The next week, Ella returned to the pool. She saw a boy with curly ginger hair and a backwards green cap. He was splashing happily. "Hi, I'm Leo!" he called. Ella hesitated. She remembered how she made a friend before. "I'm Ella," she said. They practiced kicking together. Leo showed her how to blow bubbles. Ella's confidence grew. That night, a picture of two children swimming appeared in the notebook.



Ella began to look forward to each new page. She tried a new food at lunch and a picture of a carrot appeared. She helped a friend tie her shoe and a picture of tied laces appeared. Each small brave step filled the notebook with colorful drawings. Grandfather visited and they looked at the pages together. "See?" he said. "Courage is built one small step at a time." Ella nodded, her freckles crinkling with her smile.



One day, Mrs. Penny announced a class show-and-tell. Ella wanted to share her notebook but felt nervous. What if the other kids laughed? She talked to Grandfather. "What if they don't like it?" she asked. Grandfather hugged her. "Being brave means trying even when you're scared," he said. Ella decided to be brave. She practiced what she would say. The notebook stayed blank that day, but Ella's courage was growing.



The day of show-and-tell arrived. Ella held her notebook tightly. When Mrs. Penny called her name, she walked to the front. Her legs felt shaky, but she remembered all the pictures inside. "This notebook is special," she began. "It shows my brave steps." She opened it and showed the class the drawings. Her classmates oohed and aahed. Mrs. Penny smiled warmly. "Thank you, Ella," she said. "That was very brave."



That afternoon, Ella opened her notebook and gasped. A new picture had appeared! It showed a girl standing in front of the class, holding a notebook, with a big smile. Ella showed Grandfather. "You see?" he said. "Every time you try, you grow braver." Ella looked at all the pictures: the raised hand, the friend, the swimming, the show-and-tell. She realized that courage wasn't one big thing. It was many little tries, even when things felt hard.



Ella decided to try something new. She had always wanted to climb the big tree in the park but was afraid of heights. With Grandfather watching, she took a deep breath and started to climb. One branch at a time, she went higher. When she reached the top, she felt like a hero. That evening, a picture of a girl in a tree appeared in her notebook. Ella smiled, knowing she could do anything she set her mind to.



Grandfather came for dinner. Ella showed him the new picture. "I'm so proud of you," he said. "You've learned that courage is not about being fearless. It's about trying even when you're scared." Ella hugged him. "Thank you for the notebook," she said. "It helped me see my bravery." Grandfather's eyes crinkled. "The notebook just shows what was always inside you," he said. Ella knew he was right.



Ella continued to fill her notebook with pictures. She tried a new bike route, spoke up when someone was unkind, and even sang in the school choir. Each page told a story of a small step. Her friends noticed how brave she had become. "You're not shy anymore!" said Mia. Ella smiled. "I'm still shy sometimes," she said. "But I try anyway." The notebook grew thicker with drawings, each one a reminder of her growing courage.



One day, Ella met a new girl at school who looked lonely. Ella remembered how she felt on her first day. She walked over and said hello. The girl's face lit up. They played together at recess. That night, a picture of two girls sharing a snack appeared in the notebook. Ella realized that courage also meant being kind. She felt happy that she could help someone else feel brave, too.



Ella placed her notebook on her shelf, next to her favorite books. She looked at the cover, now worn from use. Inside were dozens of pictures, each one a small victory. She thought of Grandfather's words: "Courage comes in small steps." She knew there would be more fears to face and more pictures to fill. But she also knew she could do it, one little step at a time. And that made her feel brave.