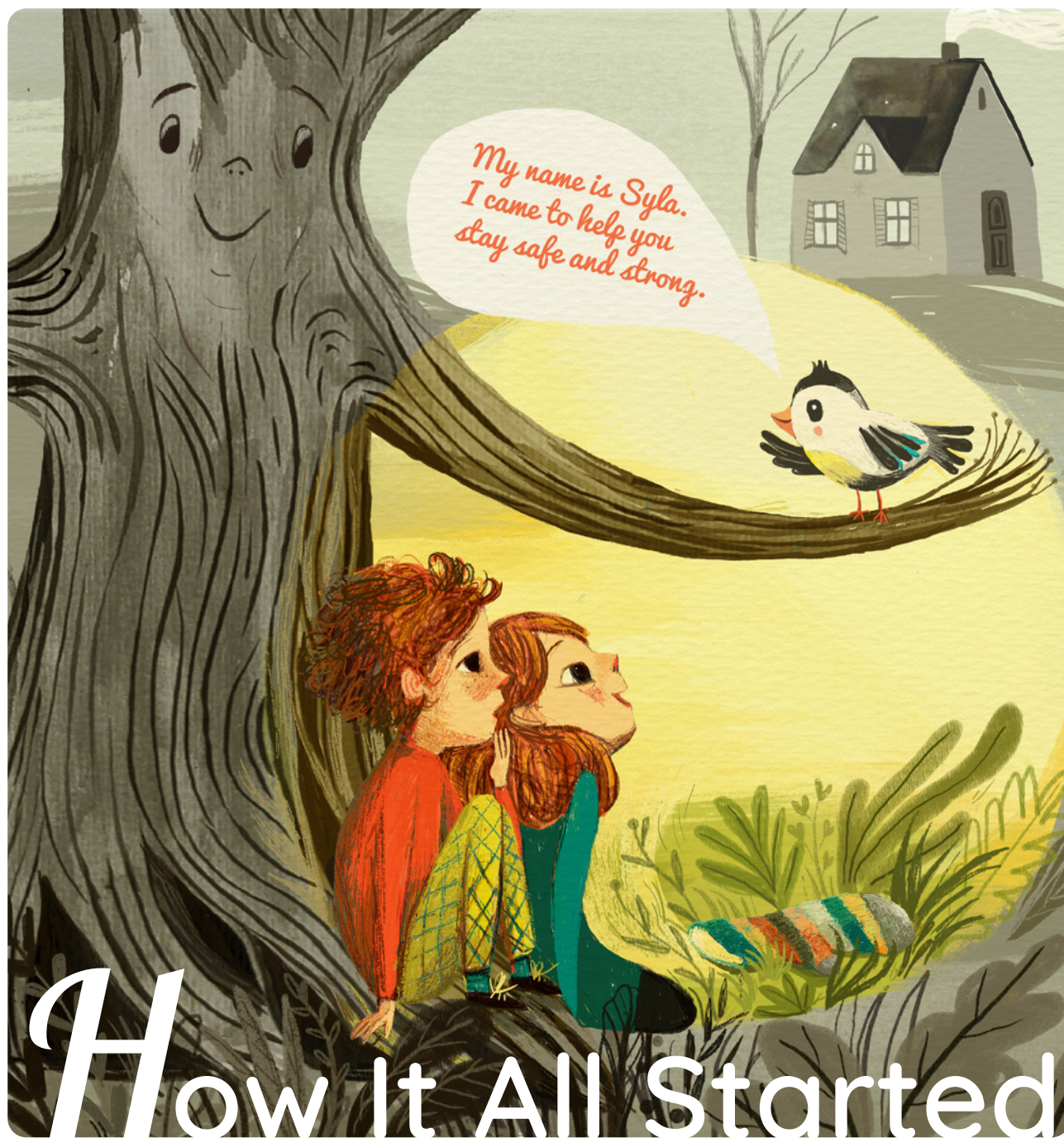


Magic Mitten



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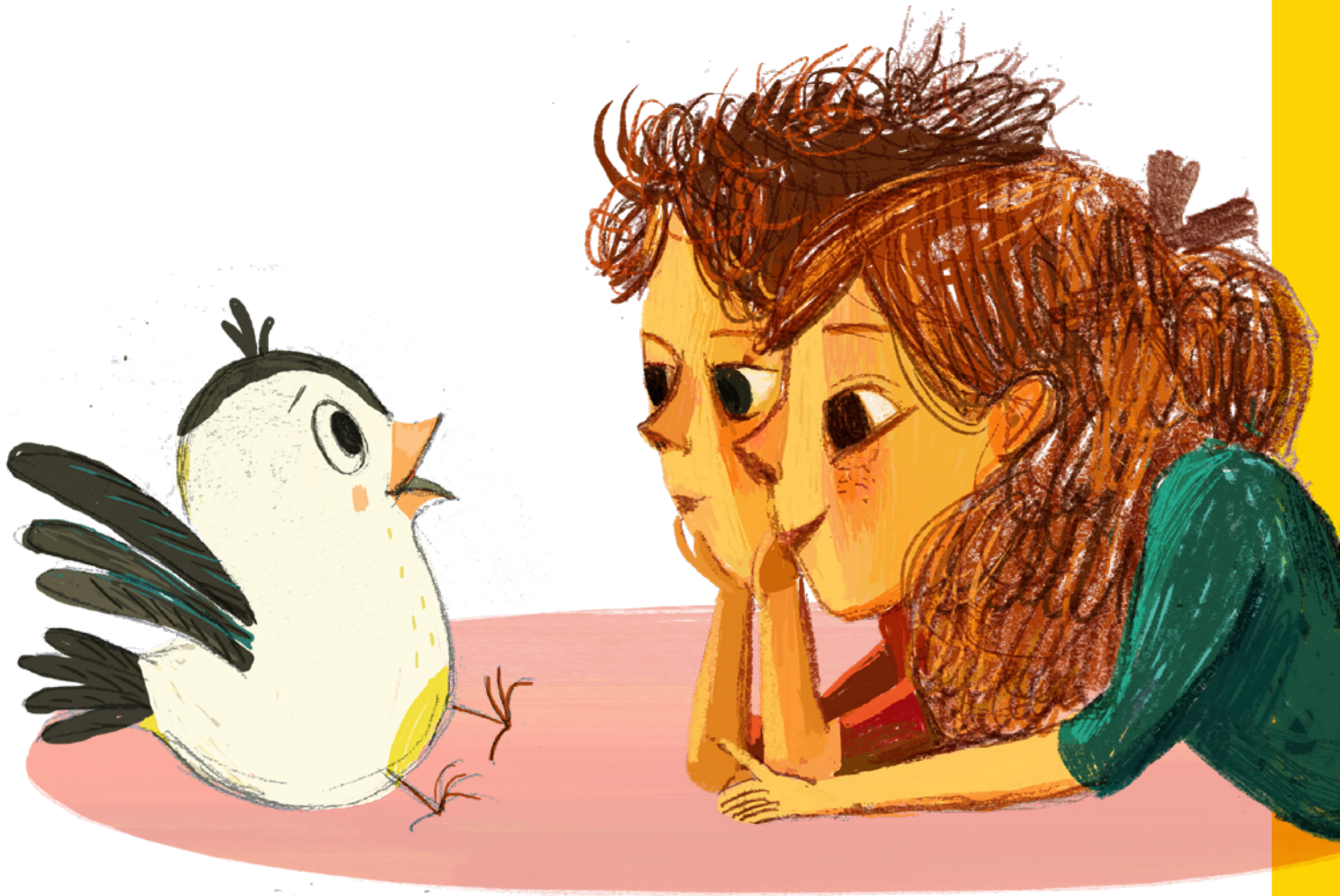


How It All Started

It was a cold, windy day. Although the scent of spring was in the air, the trees still looked bare and dull, just like the pale faces of Andriy and Anna, the 8 years old twins, who were silently sitting at the foot of an old, bare oak tree. They have been on the road for three weeks, having fled from their beloved city, when the war broke out. They did not have the chance to take anything with them, except for some clothes and their favorite stuffed animals, which now meant the world to them.

As they were sitting at the foot of the tree, cuddling their beloved teddy bears, suddenly a strong breeze came and blew a beautiful white mitten in front of them. Their gloomy expressions lightened up in the matter of a second. They jumped up and looked around, checking where the mitten had come from. But they saw no one around, except for their mother a little further away, busy with getting their sandwiches ready for lunch. “This looks exactly like the mitten from the folk tale mother used to tell us”, said Andriy, bending down to take a closer look at it. “Absolutely! I wonder if there are any animals living inside, looking for a shelter, just like in the story...just like us,” replied Anna, reaching out for the mitten. But the moment she touched it, the mitten moved and a strange, tinkling sound came out of it. They both jumped up from fright and hugged each other. In the next moment they just could not believe their eyes: a cute little bird flew out of the mitten, looking straight in the eyes of the shaking twins. “Hey! Don’t be afraid of me! I’m harmless. My name is Syla, and I travelled with the wind and came here because I thought you need me,” said the little bird. “I came to help you stay safe and strong.”





The twins still couldn't say a word. Their bodies were still shaking, but their eyes showed something different than fear. This twinkle was something that hadn't been seen in their eyes for weeks: it was curiosity. The little bird flew on a bench near them, and continued in a soft, calm voice.

"I know you have been through a lot. But I can tell you that at one point this will be over. Until that, if you want, I can stay for a week and teach you a great exercise every day, how to navigate through all those heavy emotions and thoughts that are burdening you. Do you want to give it a try?" the little bird asked.

First it was Anna who took all her courage to reply. "Which country are you coming from?" she asked.



“I am not coming from any country. The sky has no borders” Syla replied, looking up at the beautiful, clear sky.

“How lucky you are,” said Andriy, with a sad grimace on his face. “It would be nice if you could stay and teach me how to feel strong and brave again,” he said, trying to stop his legs from trembling.

“I will teach you how to discover that you never stopped being strong and brave. It’s just our feelings and our body’s response to our feelings that we interpret wrongly many times,” Syla replied. “So come here, take a seat, put your cute little bear on your lap and let’s start our discovery about our beautiful bodies and emotions, while your mother finishes your lunch,” she said.



Day 1.

Anna and Andriy were sitting at the foot of the old, bare oak tree with wide open, curious eyes, as Sylva was perching on the beautiful, white mitten. Andriy's legs were still shaking a bit, no matter how hard he was trying to flex his muscles, and this was making him really embarrassed.

"You know, Andriy, you don't have to stop your body from shaking!" said Sylva, flying onto the shoulder of the boy, touching his face softly with her wing. "Shaking is a blessing of nature to get rid of the tension in our muscles after a stressful event. Even though shaking might feel strange and scary, it actually helps our body and our mind release stress and return to a state of balance," she said. Andriy looked at the bird with gratitude and felt a little bit relieved.

“**T**

oday I want to tell you about our beautiful and clever body, and how movement can help in giving it a break,” said Syla, flying back to the mitten. “When you experience strong emotions, most of the times you feel something in your body, too, right?” she asked, looking at the twins.

“When we had to leave our house and I was really scared, it felt like there was a huge weight on my chest, it was so hard to breathe,” Anna answered. “And when I realized that Daddy can’t come with us, I was extremely sad... It felt like a knife was cutting my throat,” she said, with tears gathering in her eyes.

Syla flew onto her shoulder, rubbing her little head against the girl’s face. “You guys are the bravest twins I ever met. And your Daddy and Mommy must be so proud of you. And even if you feel terrible sadness, maybe even guilt for leaving your loved ones behind, you should know that none of what has happened is your fault. You have to believe me. At the same time, emotions are just part of being human, even if this makes life difficult sometimes. But even the strong, unpleasant emotions are your emotions, too. They help you to respond to a situation the best way you can!”

The boy and the girl looked a little bit confused, so Syla went on, giving some examples.

“Let’s look at fear! It helps to mobilize our body when we have to solve a threatening situation. While anger pushes us to release the tension that is building up inside us, sadness operates like the alarm of our body, telling us about loss and about what is actually important for us. It can also signal that an experience has hurt us, and we shall seek support. But we should always remember: We can work with our emotions to change them.”





“**B**ut how?” Anna asked.

“Sometimes just noticing them can be helpful, paying attention to the sensations they bring into our body,” Syla said, flying onto the mitten again.

“This is a magic mitten that was able to house so many animals in the folk tale, even a bear and a fox, remember?” she asked, and the twins nodded. “Now this mitten is our magical shelter, housing all the tools we need to feel better,” Syla said, pulling some white paper sheets and colored pencils out of it. “Do you see this human figure on the paper?” she asked, pointing at the paper she just pulled out. “I would like you to draw on it! Use the red pencil and draw where you feel pain, tension, pressure or anything else, when you experience fear, anxiety, or any other unpleasant emotions,” she said, giving some pencils to the children.

Draw what you feel!

The kids started drawing circles, lines, waves, sharp objects, butterflies, hearts and all kinds of shapes on the figure. Would you like to try it, too? Mark and draw where you feel pain, tension or anything else in your body when you experience fear, anger or any other unpleasant feelings! You can use the shapes that you see around the body: draw the shapes that are similar to what you feel in your body to the places where you experience them! It can be anywhere in the body!

Where is safety in your body?

Can you draw where safety is in your body? Where do you feel warmth when you are safe and comfortable? Draw there the shape of the sun!

Where is calmness in your body?

Can you draw where calmness is in your body? Draw there the shape of the water!

Where is happiness in your body?

Can you draw where happiness is in your body? Draw there the shape of the pink heart!

Where is curiosity in your body?

Can you draw where curiosity is in your body? Draw there the shape of the butterfly!

Where is gratitude in your body?

Can you draw where gratitude is in your body? Draw there the shape of the rainbow!

What do you feel now?

You can use all the shapes that you see around the body: draw the shapes that are similar to what you feel in your body at the moment to the places where you experience them!



**TOOL:** Flex your muscles!

Do you want to try another exercise that Sylva taught the twins? It helps you when the tension and the emotions are just too heavy, too much to handle, and you need a little ease, a little break. This is a very simple stretching exercise, working your way from the bottom of your body up to your head! Start by stretching the muscles of your toes for three seconds, and then relax them. Now flex your muscles in the sole of your foot for 3 seconds, then relax. Then come your calves, your thigh, your trunk, your shoulder, your arm, your fist, your neck and finally your face (make a huge grin!!) – flexing and relaxing them one by one! If you are done, give your body a huge shake. Shake out your legs and your arms, too!

Write or draw or record about how you feel after doing it!



TOOL: Rhythmic moves

When you feel anxious or tense, you can also try the following rhythmic exercises that help you feel calmer:

Do skipping back and forth for 5 minutes, raising your opposing feet and arm at the same time! Do 10 jumps with both feet, then 10 jumps with your right foot, then 10 with your left foot! Find a ball and bounce it 50 times with your right hand, then 50 times with your left hand! Put on some music and start clapping the rhythm along with it! Or just dance!

All rhythmic exercises help you feel a little calmer! Try one of them now! Which is your favorite?

Now choose someone you know who you can teach this great knowledge and the exercises tomorrow. Write or draw who it will be!



Andriy and Anna woke up the next morning to the beautiful chirping of Sylla. They looked at each other with a little confusion, wondering whether it was just a strange dream about the little bird coming to comfort them. They quickly got dressed and started to look for Sylla, who had already been waiting for them, greeting the twins with a happy chatter.

“So it wasn’t a dream after all!” said Anna with a huge smile.

“It looks like it wasn’t,” replied Andriy. But his voice didn’t sound happy at all. His face was severe and gloomy. He crossed his arms on his chest, giving an angry look at Sylla.

“What’s wrong with you?” asked Anna. “She came here to help us!”

“I don’t care! It’s easy for her to be flying around, as if she knows what it means to lose your home. What is it us who have to go through all of this? Last night I saw my classmate Maksym’s photos on Instagram, on Mom’s phone. He was posting from London. He could go there with his parents, to his uncle’s house. They were sitting in a beautiful restaurant, with a huge hamburger on their plate. Why can’t I be as lucky as him? Why are we stuck here? How could a stupid little bird help us? I just want to be left alone!” he shouted angrily and ran away. Anna was standing frozen, her cheeks turning red from confusion and shame.

“Don’t worry Anna,” said Syla on a soft voice. “It is OK to be angry. You have all the reasons to be angry, so you shouldn’t hold it in! Remember what we talked about yesterday? Anger helps you realize that something is wrong or unfair, which can mobilize a lot of energy in us. But if it pushes you to do things instinctively, without thinking, you might act in a way that you will later regret. Remember: you can use anger in a smart way, too. Anger can motivate you to fight for your rights. Words are the strongest weapons of all time. When used cleverly, words can change everything. In the meantime, you can learn not to hold on to your anger for too long, and see what else is out there for you. This is why I’m here. This is what I want to teach you,” she said. Anna silently nodded, wiping the tears from her eyes.

“There is an amazing method that I learned from a nice lady, who worked with many children who had to flee from their homes,” said the little bird. “Her method is called Helping Hand”. When you feel upset or confused, you just have to use your hand to get an overview of your thoughts and feelings. An overview helps you take better choices. This is why I also love flying high enough to see the landscape before I decide where to go, what to do, and how to do it,” Syla sang.



Anna sat down and seemed curious to know more about this. So Sylva went into the magic mitten and pulled out a new sheet of paper, with a palm on it.

“Can you show me your hand?” she asked Anna, who opened her palm. The little bird flew onto her thumb.

“Each finger means a question you should ask yourself,” Sylva said. “The first is the thumb, when you ask: What’s up? Take a pencil and write about the situation you are in, which makes you feel and think in a certain way.





EXERCISE:

Anna was immersed in her thoughts for a while, and eventually she wrote down: “I had to leave my Dad, my home, my friends, and all of my toys and books behind, and I am living at a refugee camp with my brother and my sister.” Sylva nodded silently, and flew onto her index finger.

“Now ask yourself: What am I feeling?”

This time Anna didn't think too much before she started writing: “I feel sad. I feel alone. I feel angry. I am worried. I am worried about my Dad who stayed behind. I am worried about my brother who feels even worse than I do.” Syla flew onto Anna's shoulder, touching her face softly and gently. “You are amazing! It takes a lot of courage to be able to write down your feelings!” she said as she flew onto the girl's middle finger.

“Now come your Red thoughts! Write down all those thoughts that cause uneasy feelings!”

Anna was thinking for a while, and then wrote: “My mother... I am so worried for her. She is not herself. We will never have a home again. Everything is destroyed. My father...I will never see him again, never... in his life.”

Syla saw dark clouds gathering in Anna's eyes while she was going through her red thoughts. So when she finished writing, the little bird flew onto her ring finger. “It must have been difficult for you to phrase these unpleasant thoughts and feelings! But you are so good at identifying them! You're speaking from the bottom of your heart, without holding back. That is a big gift that makes it so much easier for people to understand and help you. I am so impressed that I will fly an extra round and sing a song for you!” Syla chattered, happy about the trust Anna has given her by sharing her feelings and thoughts.

Hearing Syla's gratitude and reassurance, some Green Thoughts started to take shape in Anna's mind: thoughts that made her feel safer and happier. Then she started writing again:

“We met some really nice people here who tried to help us. Mom said we will have a new house and maybe even a puppy when we can settle down. Mom and Andriy are here with me. Mom is Mom, she is strong as a lion. I can learn new things about the world.”

“You are truly amazing! These are great thoughts!” Syla said with a warm tone, happily flying around the girl again, settling on her pinkie finger. “So the next question you shall ask yourself: What can I do? What can I do that will help me feel less scared, angry or sad, that will make me feel better right now?”

Anna gazed towards the trees in silence, taking a long-long pause. Then she started writing: “When I am cuddling my teddy bear, or when I am playing with Andriy, I feel a little a bit better. When I close my eyes and think about my future, how I am going to be a doctor, I also feel happier.” Sylva was really amazed by these answers.

“Now, there is only one question left,” she said, flying right into Anna’s palm. “And the question is: Who can support me?”

“It’s an easy one,” the girl said. “Mom, my brother, my Dad – who is always with me, even if he stayed behind.” she wrote, and a soft smile appeared on her face. “My Dad would be really proud of me if he saw how much we walked without complaining,” she said.

“I am absolutely sure. And you should be proud of yourself, too!” the little bird replied.



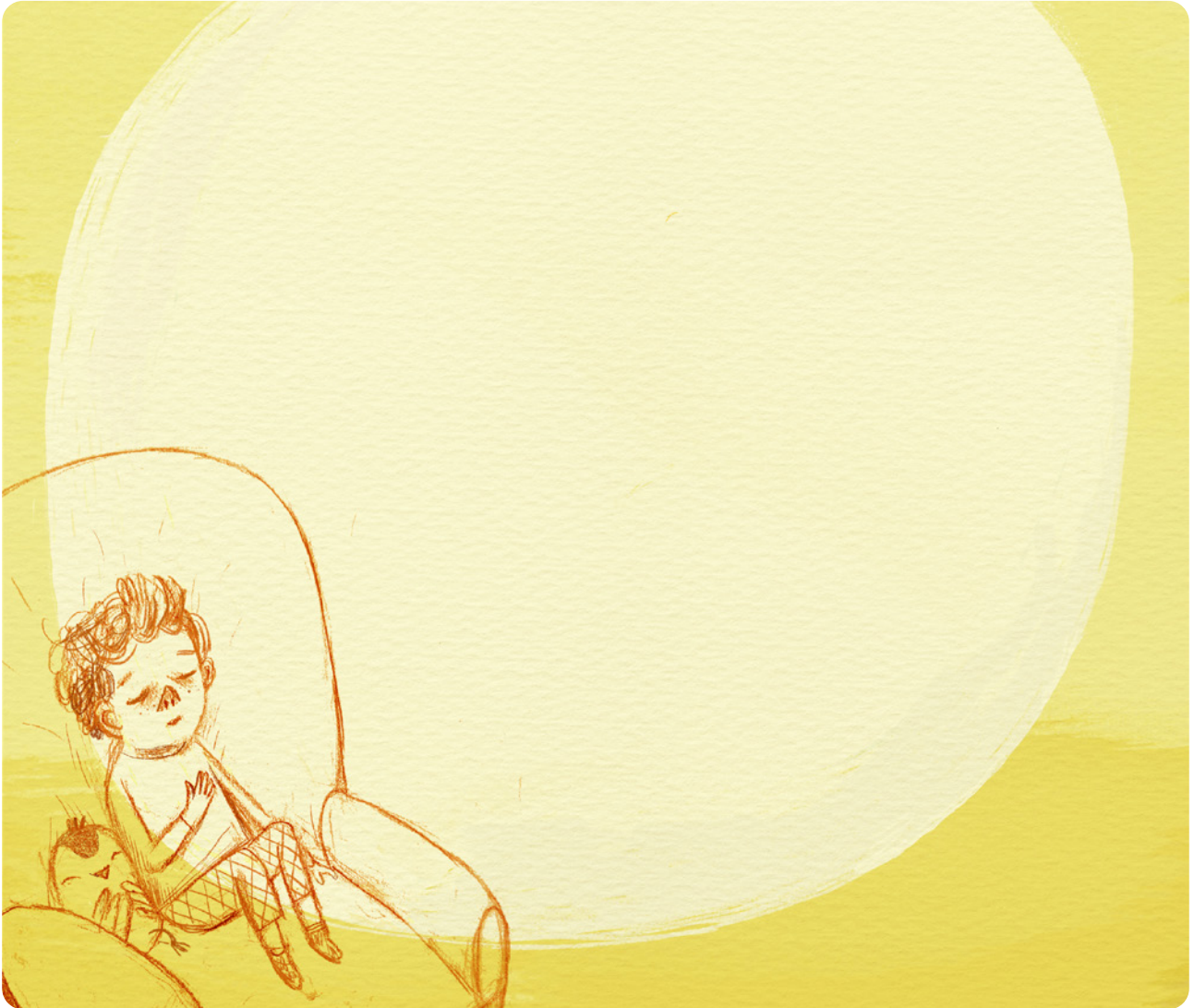


TOOL: Try the Helping Hand!

Can you use your palm, as Sylva explained, to ask yourself and answer these questions below?

1. What's up? What's going on right now?
2. What do I feel, and how intense on a scale from 1 - 10?
(happy, sad, angry, content, calm, worried, or anything else)
3. What are my red thoughts - what thoughts make this more difficult?
4. What green thoughts could be helpful?
5. What can I do to feel better?
6. Who can support me?

When you feel angry, upset, anxious, or if you cannot sleep at night, try the following tool!



TOOL: Take a picture about a nice memory!

Sit or lay down in a relaxed position, close your eyes, put one of your hands on your heart, and try to remember a **BEAUTIFUL MOMENT WITH YOUR FAMILY OR WITH YOUR FRIENDS!**

For example, a birthday party or a family Christmas, a nice vacation or a fun day with your friends at school – any moment when you felt happy and safe. When you found this moment, (which might make you feel some warmth in your body,) take a photo of it in your head! Now frame this photo in a beautiful frame! You can also give it a title! Save this precious photo in your mind! Try to recall this picture several times a day, slowing down for a moment, putting your hand on your heart. You can also recall this picture when you feel anxious or lonely.

Try this exercise again when you go to bed, before you sleep! Draw this picture above, or write or record how you imagined this picture!



Day 3.

The next morning Anna and Andriy jumped out of bed with no hesitation, eager to see the little bird. Sylva was already waiting for the twins, greeting them with a beautiful chatter.

“I’m so sorry about what I told you yesterday,” said Andriy apologetically, sitting down next to little bird. “I didn’t mean it, I just felt really frustrated and angry.”

“Don’t worry, I understand. What matters is what you do in the long run with all that energy that is building up in you! Do you remember this figure?” Sylva asked, pulling out a new sheet of paper and some pencils from the magic mitten, showing the same body-figure they drew on a few days ago. “Can you draw on it where you felt the anger in your body?”

Andriy drew red clouds on the head and red arrows in the stomach of the human shape.

EXERCISE: Track your sensations! What do you feel now?

You can use all the shapes that you see around the body: draw the shapes that are similar to what you feel in your body at the moment to the places where you experience them!



EXERCISE: Where is a safe place?

Imagine yourself in a safe place. Draw or write down, or record: Where are you? Who is with you? What is surrounding you? Create a plan: how can you get to this safe place, or to a similar place where you feel safe? Who can help you in this?

 *Tools***TOOL: Learn how to belly breathe!**

While the twins do this breathing exercise, can you also give it a try? Lie down on the ground or on a sofa and put a rock or a book on your belly. Breathe in through your nose, down into your belly very slowly, while you count to five. Then breathe out through your mouth very slowly again, while you count to six. Repeat this five or six times while you watch the stone lifting up and down! If you learn to belly-breathe slowly, you can practice it any time, even without having to lie down. Slow breathing can really help you calm yourself down when feeling stressed, while counting can bring your attention back and away from future worries, into the present moment!



“When you feel that the tension is starting to build up in these places, you can try to release them in many ways,” the little bird continued. “As long as you don’t hurt anyone, you can express your anger by jumping, taking a big run, screaming, or finding words to describe what’s wrong, unfair or painful. Sometimes saying a bad word can be helpful, too. While you do this, imagine that the anger is leaving your body with each movement! I can also teach you a great exercise, too, which helps you in getting calmer. Can you both find a small rock nearby?” the little bird asked. When the twins each found a rock, Syla asked them to lay down on the ground, on their back.

“Now put the rock onto your belly and try to focus on your breathing. First, take a huge breath in. Try to take it right down into your belly very slowly, while you count to five. Then breath out through your mouth very slowly again, while you count to six. If you do it right, you will see the stone lifting up and down on your belly,” Syla said.

“Now try to repeat this again. Take a huge, slow breath in...and exhale it very slowly. Do you feel some warmth, an island of calmness in your body somewhere?” Syla asked. Anna pointed at her belly. Andriy showed the area around his heart.



After the exercise, the twins sat under the huge oak tree again, and the little bird perched on the magic mitten right in front of them. “Can you tell me why you felt so angry yesterday?” Syla asked Andriy.

“I was angry because things just keep happening to me, and I can’t do anything about that. As if someone else makes all the decisions about my life,” Andriy replied. The little bird flew onto his shoulder and touched his face softly with her wings.

“I hear you. This must feel difficult. When the world turns upside down, it’s not easy to see that we cannot control things we used to be able to. But there are a couple of things you can do about this. For example, trying to bring back habits and traditions into your everyday life may be helpful. Were there things that you did every day back at home, things that you liked?”

“Mom used to read or tell us a tale every evening after supper. And she used to tell us stories from her childhood, every time when she was combing my hair after washing it. And every Saturday evening we used to play cards, and after that Mom always made pancakes. We call them Nalysnyky. I love the smell of them!” Anna replied.

EXERCISE: Bring back your old traditions!

Can you write or draw some traditions you had at home, ones you'd want to bring back? If there aren't any traditions that you can bring back, try creating new ones in your family! Just like the following:

Baking a pie/pancakes every Sunday afternoon. Going on a family walk every Saturday morning. Starting a family diary and writing stories about the week together every Friday evening. Reading a book together every night before you go to bed. Sitting together with a hot chocolate every Sunday evening, everyone talking about their most joyful memory from the past. Exercising or going out to run together every Saturday morning.



“You can ask your mom to bring back these traditions,” said Syla. “And there is another nice way to experience that we can still control things and make a difference in the world,” she added. The twins gave her a look full of curiosity.

“The answer is very simple. When we help others, we make an impact. We then feel empowered and valuable. And it doesn’t have to be a huge thing. Simple acts can be just as powerful,” the little bird said. “Can you tell me how you might be able to help someone today?” she asked Andriy. The boy started thinking about that.

“There is a little boy who came from our city. I think he is even angrier than I am. He had to leave both of his parents behind, and came with his aunt,” he said. “Maybe I could play with him. Or maybe I could teach him what I learned from you,” Andriy said.

“I am sure that would mean a lot to him. Maybe he wouldn’t appreciate it at first. When we feel vulnerable, it can be difficult to accept help. But it is worth trying gently!” Syla said.

“And yesterday Syla showed me a great exercise, called the Helping Hand. We can also teach this to this little boy! But let me show you first!” said Anna cheerfully to her brother.



TOOL: Practice the Helping Hand again!

1. What's up? What's going on right now in my life?
2. What do I feel right now?
3. What are my red thoughts?
4. What green thoughts could be helpful?
5. What can I do to feel better?
6. Who can support me?





Day 4.

“Anna! Andriy!” called the little bird to the twins the next morning, when the sun was already high up in the sky. The children got really excited to hear her voice and quickly gathered under the huge oak tree, where Sylva was already waiting for them.

“Today I will teach you another great exercise,” she said. “Yesterday we talked about how difficult it is to accept when our life takes a huge turn, and how it can bring so many strong and unpleasant emotions. But believe it or not, even in the most helpless situations there are still things in our lives that we can control and decide about! This is what the next exercise will demonstrate and teach you!”

The little bird pulled out some new sheets from the magic mitten that had a square and a circle on them. “First of all, can you think of some things in your life that you cannot influence at the moment? Write these down in the square shape, and then please share these with me,” Syla asked. The twins quickly came up with some examples.

“We can’t influence the timing of when we’ll be able to return home, or when we will see our family members again. We also can’t control when we can play with our best friends again,” they said.

“And can you write down some examples of things that you can still decide about in your life? Write these in the circle!” she asked. Now it took more time for the twins to come up with examples, but eventually they started writing, and then sharing their thoughts.

“I can decide what I play! Or what stories I make up from my imagination!” Andriy said.

“I can also decide to write a letter to my best friend and ask Mom to send it in an email to her mother. I can at least try to stay in touch with her,” Anna continued with a sad grimace.

“That is a really wise and kind idea! Losing the chance to play with your friend is something you cannot influence at the moment. But doing all you can to stay in touch is something you can still do!” Syla said with a lot of kindness in her voice.

“But why does it matter if we can separate these things?” Andriy asked.

“When we feel utterly lost, sometimes we just spend too much energy trying to change things we cannot influence. This can cause a lot of anxiety and hopelessness. At the same time, we tend to stop paying attention to the things that we can still influence, things that make us feel better. If we practice this exercise, it will be easier to notice those moments when we focus on things we cannot change, and try to direct our thoughts to the things we can!”

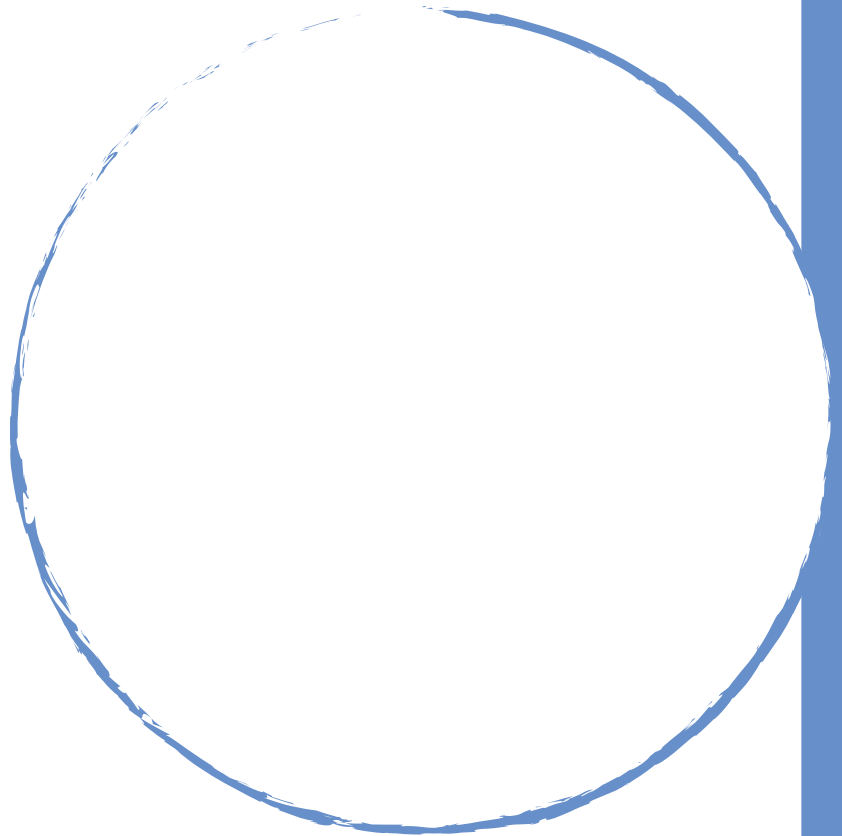
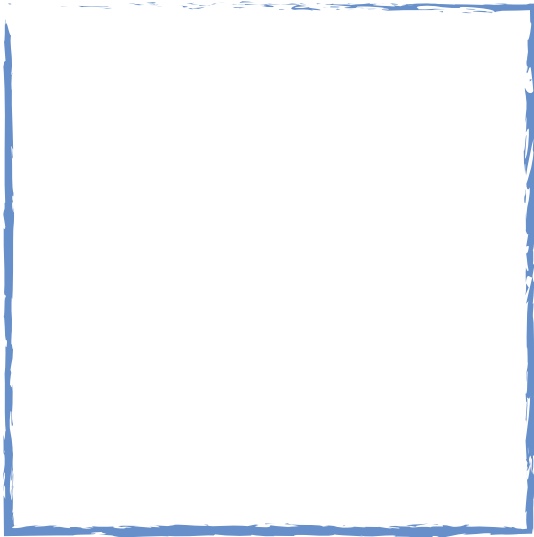


EXERCISE: Draw your circle of influence!

Write some things you can't change or control in your life in the square!

Then write the things you can still decide about and influence in the circle!

Write as many ideas in the circle as you can!



Now put the following sentences into the square if you think that these are things you cannot control in your life. Or put them into the circle if you think that these are things that you can influence.

Choosing who I play or spend time with. Choosing my neighbors. Traveling to other places. Going to school. How many siblings I have. Asking for help. Reading. Past decisions that I made. What grades I get. My Mom being sad or nervous. Baking a pie with somebody. The weather turning into rainy. Seeing all of my family members. Finding out new games with my friends. Exploring my environment. Skipping homework. Falling asleep. Going to bed in time. Having to move to a new city. My parents arguing. Learning a new sport. Working out with my friends. Telling about my fears to someone I trust. Persisting even when something is difficult to do. Staying curious.

When the twins finished the exercise, the little bird asked them to stand up and stretch a little.

“Do you remember that moving, and also stretching is always great when we feel that our feelings are just too strong. Now raise your arms to the sky, stretching them as high as you can,” Syla asked. “Open your legs in a straddle-stand position and feel your feet become one with the ground,” she said. After a few minutes the twins really felt like they were strong trees, rooting into the ground, reaching into the sky.



TOOL: Stretch like a tree!

Imagine that you are a huge oak tree, and your feet go deep into the ground as the roots of a tree, and your arms reach high up to the clouds as the branches.

Breathe in through your nose slowly, right to your belly, just as we learned, and exhale slowly through your mouth. Can you feel how connected you are with the Earth and with the Sky? How strong and stable you are?

**EXERCISE: Help others and you help yourself!**

One of the best ways to feel in control of your life is by helping others. Is there anyone who you helped in some way in the past couple of weeks? Is there someone around you who you could help in the next few days? Make a plan! Write or draw it!

If you need some tips, choose one from the following ideas each week, and support or help people around you:

Playing with the other children in the neighborhood, especially with the ones who seem to be lonely or without company. Noticing if someone struggles with homework in your class and offering some support if you are good at the subject. Noticing if an elderly person or a parent with small children needs some help with carrying a bag or crossing the street. Standing up for someone who is bullied or excluded in your community. Helping your parents in the household. (for example, surprising your parent by setting the table nicely for supper!) Cleaning your room without your Mom asking you to do it.

TOOL: Practice the Helping Hand again!

1. What's up? What's going on right now in my life?
2. What do I feel right now?
3. What are my red thoughts?
4. What green thoughts could be helpful?
5. What can I do to feel better?
6. Who can support me?





Day 5.

The next morning Anna woke up in tears. When she opened her eyes, she wasn't sure where she was – all she knew was that she was exhausted from trying to escape from a monster all night long. It was a terrible nightmare. She didn't feel like getting out of the bed at all. Luckily her mom came quickly and held her arms around Anna really tight, rocking her, holding her for more than an hour. Andriy cuddled up with them too, also letting his tears soak the dress of his mom, who started to sing old songs to them – songs that she remembered from the time when they were toddlers. When the twins calmed down, she gave them a kiss and asked warmly, “Would you like to talk about it?”

Maybe later,” Anna replied. “I’d rather go outside now, have some fresh air,” she added, as she was really keen on seeing Syla. The little bird welcomed them with a warm tune. But another friend was waiting for them outside, too: Pepper, the terrier dog, which was an old lady’s pet who they knew from before. When the puppy came over to play with them, it always cheered the twins up.

“Do you want to talk about your dream?” Syla asked the girl later. Anne nodded silently.

“I don’t remember every detail, but I felt terrified from that creature, this monster was going to eat me. I know it sounds silly, I don’t believe in monsters anymore, but it felt so real. I felt that no one is there to protect me and I cannot count on anyone anymore,” she said with a little embarrassment, turning back to make sure that her mother didn’t hear her.



“Don’t be ashamed of your dreams or your thoughts,” said Syla, flying to Anna’s shoulder. “All parents want to protect their children from all possible dangers and hardships. But when a war breaks out, many times they can’t control the circumstances, and everyone’s life turns upside down. This can cause the children and also the parents to have difficult thoughts and feelings. Just try to retain your trust in your mom. She will do all she can to keep you safe,” the little bird said.

“I know she is doing all she can. She is strong. But this whole thing freaks her out. Her mood is all over the place, and it changes in no time. She can get really impatient and angry. So, we try to be good kids to help her as much as we can,” Anna said. The little bird touched her face gently.

“When the adults encounter too many challenges, they can lose their patience more easily than they do normally. But this is not about you, Anna. And this is not about you, Andriy. And you both should also know that it’s not your duty to cheer her up,” Syla said. “Your challenge is to accept that she’s sad, afraid and even angry sometimes, without thinking that this is about you or what you have done. But do you know what makes all mothers happy? When they see their child playing and finding smaller or bigger joys! Like running around the garden, playing tag, or playing soccer! Or even laughing at a good joke. Things that the war didn’t change. Things that you can enjoy. Do you want to try a nice game?” Syla asked. When the twins nodded curiously, she pulled out two new sheets from the magic mitten.

“This is called The Things I Know Game. Your task is to look for things in your life that haven’t changed, that you know well from those days when you were still living at home. Like the joy of playing with a puppy. Like reading a nice book in bed. Or singing your favorite pop song,” Syla said, handing out the sheet.



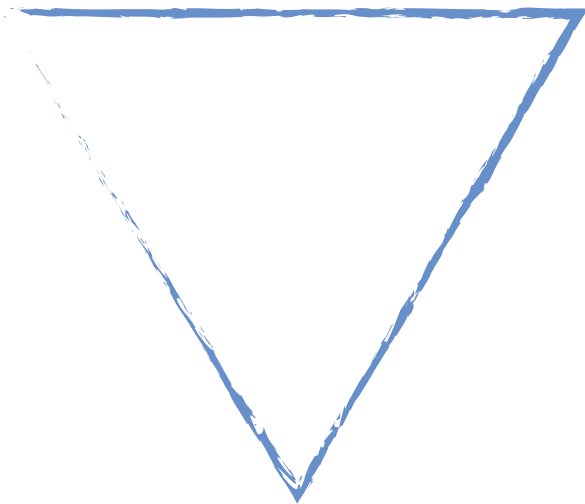
EXERCISE: Things I know!

Do you want to try this exercise? Think back to the past week and observe the upcoming days carefully. What are the things in your everyday life that are just about the same as they used to be? For example, playing with your sister or brother, or reading good books. Draw or write down these smaller or bigger things that you can still do and can be joyful!

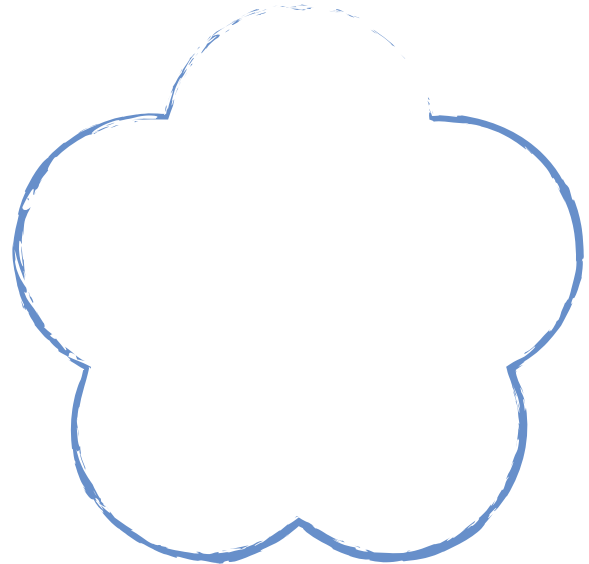
EXERCISE: What is dangerous, what is safe?

Pull the following events
/ people / sights / sounds / smells into one of the three groups!

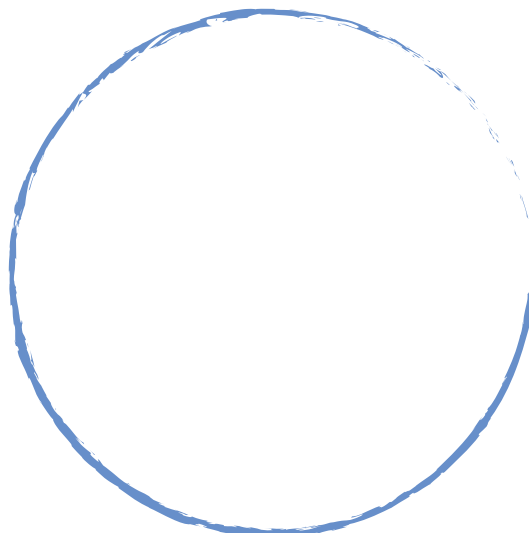
The three groups are:



IT MAKES ME FEEL UNSAFE



IT MAKES ME FEEL SAFE



IT IS NEUTRAL

EVENTS:

someone touching my head or my shoulder / being hugged / someone ringing the doorbell / a soldier walking past me / playing with a ball on the street / going to school / running on the street / being stopped by someone on the street / listening to the news / a stranger handing me food/water

SIGHTS:

a crowd of people on the street / a big group of children / a dog walking on the street / an old lady walking with her grandson / puppies playing together / a newspaper cover / a camera of a reporter

PEOPLE:

my Mom / my Dad / my siblings / my teacher / my friend / people from international organizations / a journalist / a policeman / a doctor / a nurse / a neighbor

SMELLS:

smell of soup / other people's smell / smell of flower / smell of gasoline / smell of cooking oil / smell of classroom / smell of a perfume / smell of grass

SOUNDS:

a bird singing on a tree / sound of shooting / my Mom singing / family member shouting / a stranger shouting / music from the radio / dog barking / a balloon bursting / a stranger singing

Draw or write down your own ideas about events, people, sights, smells and sounds that make you feel unsafe or make you feel safe!

Draw or write down: when you experience the events/people/ sights/ smells and sounds that make you feel unsafe, who can support you? What can you do to feel safe? Where can you go to feel safe?

When the twins finished writing, Anna asked, “There are many things in my life that I like to do. But that doesn’t mean that I never get sad. What if I cannot stop myself from crying? What if my tears will make my mom even more worried?”

“Never stop yourself from crying, my dear,” Syla told her warmly. “Crying is a blessing because it spans a full range of our feelings, whether it is sadness, frustration, anger, grief or joy. Crying is our most ancient tool that helps us calm down, and it even produces chemicals in our body that help us connect with others and ease pain. And I will tell you a secret legend that my great grandmother shared with me: the powerful, huge salty oceans on Earth were filled up by our ancestors’ salty tears, caused by the pain and the joy they lived through from generation to generation. So as the oceans encapsulate the history of our ancestors, our tears, our pain and our joy build our history for the future generations,” Syla told the twins softly. Anna felt relieved. And Syla went on. – Do you remember the Helping Hand tool? When you reach the little finger, you ask yourself: What can I do? Sometimes the answer is as simple as crying. Sometimes crying is the most helpful thing to do, going deep into painful thoughts, expressing them, with or without words, and feeling the blessing ease afterwards,” she said.



TOOL: Practice the Helping Hand again!

1. What's up? What's going on right now in my life?
2. What do I feel right now?
3. What are my red thoughts?
4. What green thoughts could be helpful?
5. What can I do to feel better?
6. Who can support me?



“As for your bad dream, it can be helpful if you talk about it, draw it or write it down,” Syla said softly to Anna. “And after doing this, you can try to change the bad dream into a good, or less scary dream! Twist it, reverse it, change its ending so that you triumph in the end! Do you want to give it a try?” she asked. So Anna started writing and drawing. And a slight smile appeared on her face when she drew herself grabbing the ugly monster by its ear, with shining victory in her eyes.

EXERCISE: Draw or write about a bad dream!

Have you had any unpleasant dreams that have been difficult for you?
Do you want to write about it or draw it below?

Now think about your dream and reverse it: write or draw the opposite of what has happened or change its story to end in a good or funny way! If you were chased by a monster, switch roles and draw yourself as the one chasing the monster, or draw the monster much smaller than you! If you could not protect yourself, write or draw a scenario where you triumphed! End your dream in a plot where you are safe and powerful, where you can tackle all the challenges! Try to observe yourself: do your feelings change as you are drawing? Is there anything that you feel in your body?





TOOL: Safe touch

When you feel anxious or stressed, or bad thoughts keep coming up, you can try a nice self-soothing exercise that helps you feel calmer and better. It needs the simple touch of your face, arms and hands.

First cross your arms, and stroke your arms all the way from your shoulders down to your elbows, five times. After this, stroke your forehead with both hands, going all the way down to your cheeks on both sides, five times again. Then you put your palms together, and gently move them to the left and the right, also five times. The exercise can be repeated several times, until you feel a little ease in your body.



Day 6.

For the first time in weeks, Anna woke up with a soft smile on her face. The sun was already shining brightly, and the surrounding hills echoed Sylva's beautiful tunes in the whole neighborhood. The twins jumped out of bed and after they got dressed, they quickly ran out to meet their friend.

"What will you teach us today, Sylva?" Andriy asked.

"Today you will teach me!" the little bird replied. The children looked at her with surprise. "When we face challenging situations, many times we get unexpected gifts even from sad or unhappy events. Like making new friends. Or learning something new about the world and nature that surrounds us. Or experiencing new things we never tried before.

Or realizing that something is really important for us – something that we didn't really appreciate or pay attention to before. These are all great things! But the best gift of a challenging, new situation is finding out about a new ability or skill we are good at, a superpower we have!" Syla explained happily, while the kids were absorbing her words.

"My superpower is writing!" shouted Anna. "Since we left home, I started writing letters to Dad, about what's happening to us, what we see, and what we do. I haven't sent them, as I want to give these to him when we meet. But I realized that I really love writing, and I think I'm pretty good at it, too," she said with a shy smile.

"My superpower is biology!" replied Andriy as soon as Anna finished. "I have collected 35 different types of leaves since we left home, from trees and bushes. I pressed and dried them, sticking them into my notebook. I used the internet on Mom's phone, and I already know the names of 20 different species. I think I will be an explorer one day," he said with a proud face.

"Wow, these are amazing superpowers!" Syla said enthusiastically.



EXERCISE: Finish the sentence or draw!

“From all the changes and challenges in the past weeks I learned about myself that MY SUPERPOWER IS...”

Now read the following superpowers, and color the ones which you have!

.....

I can adapt to different new situations a lot better than I thought I can!

.....

I am able to comfort people when they are scared or worried!

.....

I am persistent and tough even when the circumstances are difficult!

.....

I can recognize my emotions very well and talk about them with people I trust!

.....

I can walk for a long time, even when I am very tired!

.....

I am able to help my Mom and people around me when they need!

.....

I can create a magical inner world from my imagination that cheers me up!

.....

I am good at writing in a diary or short stories about my experiences!

.....

I am good at remembering nice memories even when things are difficult in my life!

.....

I am good at cheering people up with my jokes or funny stories!

.....

I am open to exploring new things around me when I am in a new environment!

.....

I can make new friendships easily!

.....

“**T**here are hidden treasures in the new, sometimes difficult experiences you have gone through, things that you learned from them,” Syla continued. “For example, I’m sure you learned a lot about patience, while going through a lot of unpleasant things you weren’t used to. I’m sure you learned a lot about perseverance, too, having walked and traveled so many days and nights. Now you probably excel in empathy and compassion as well, which is about reading and understanding what other people feel – just as you have done so with your mother. So please teach me something that you have learned thanks to all the hardships, something that you didn’t know before you left your home.”

Anna was immersed in her thoughts for a few minutes, and then turned to Syla.

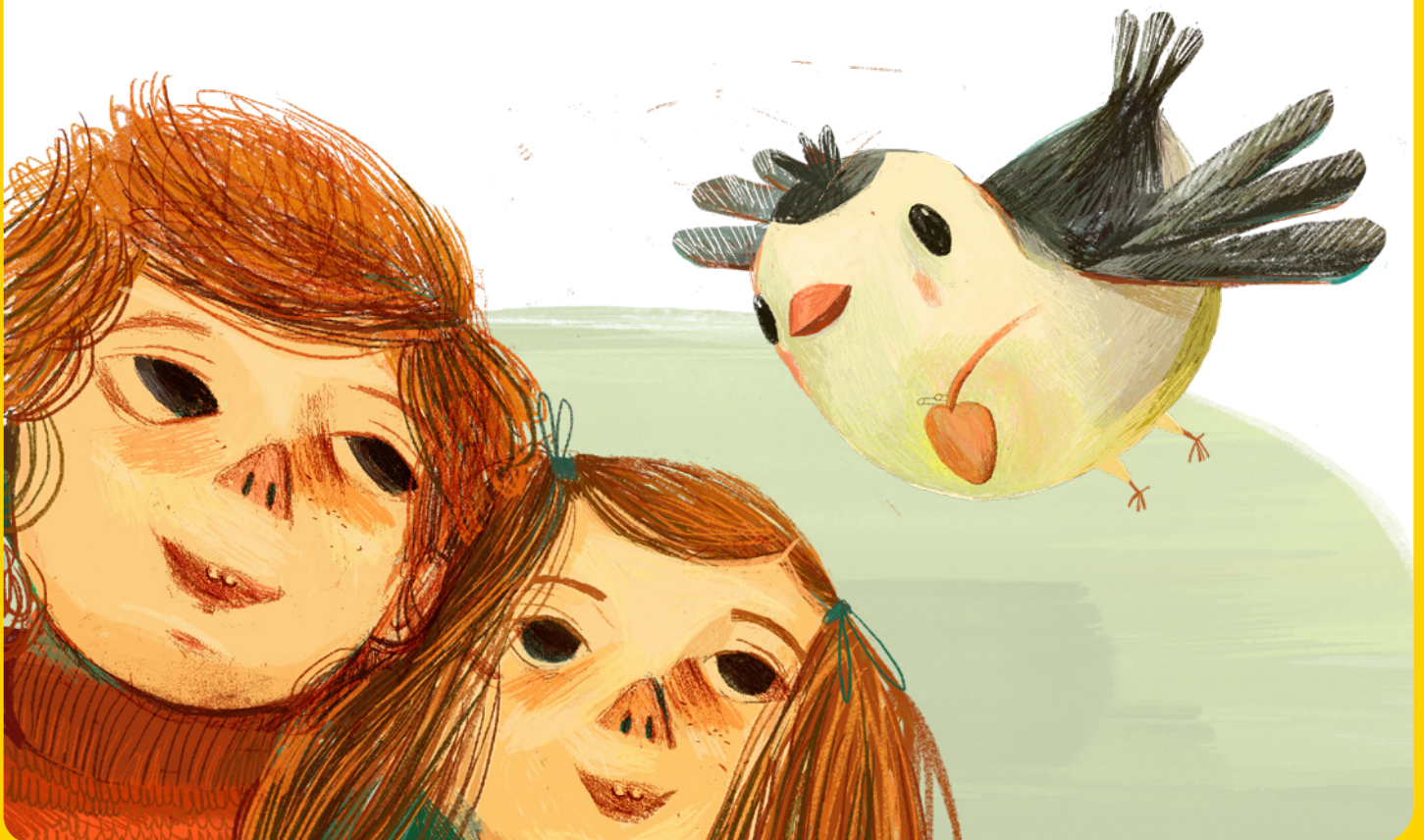


“I’ve learned that when I’m totally exhausted from walking, telling a joke and seeing other people laugh can give me extra energy to keep going longer,” she said with a perky smile. “And many times we don’t even need to speak the same language with other people to make them laugh,” she added.

“That’s a real treasure to know, thank you for sharing!” Syla said happily, flying onto Anna’s shoulder. Now it was Andriy’s turn, and the boy was thinking really-really hard to remember something that he learned in the past weeks.

“As I was cold many times, a doctor lady who we met on our way here, told me that if I eat fattier food, and drink more water, these can keep me feeling warmer for a longer time. She said it has to do with our metabolism, but I don’t quite understand the details yet. Even so, it was interesting to learn, as I love biology,” Andriy said with a sly smile, and Syla was really amazed by the things he knew and learned.

“Andriy, this is so interesting! I’m sure you will learn so many more new things about nature and about different environments as you continue on your way,” the little bird said. “Keep looking for new plants, animals, insects around you, and you will learn so much about biology! All right, I will give you a riddle about myself! What do you think, how many times does the heart of a small bird beat in a minute?” Syla asked. The twins seemed clueless. “Twenty-five?” hesitated Anna. “I’m sure it’s more than that, maybe fifty,” Andriy replied. Syla took a huge loop in the air around them and landed on Andriy’s shoulder. “It’s more than a thousand, my friends!” she said happily, and the twins were really surprised.



EXERCISE: New things I learned!

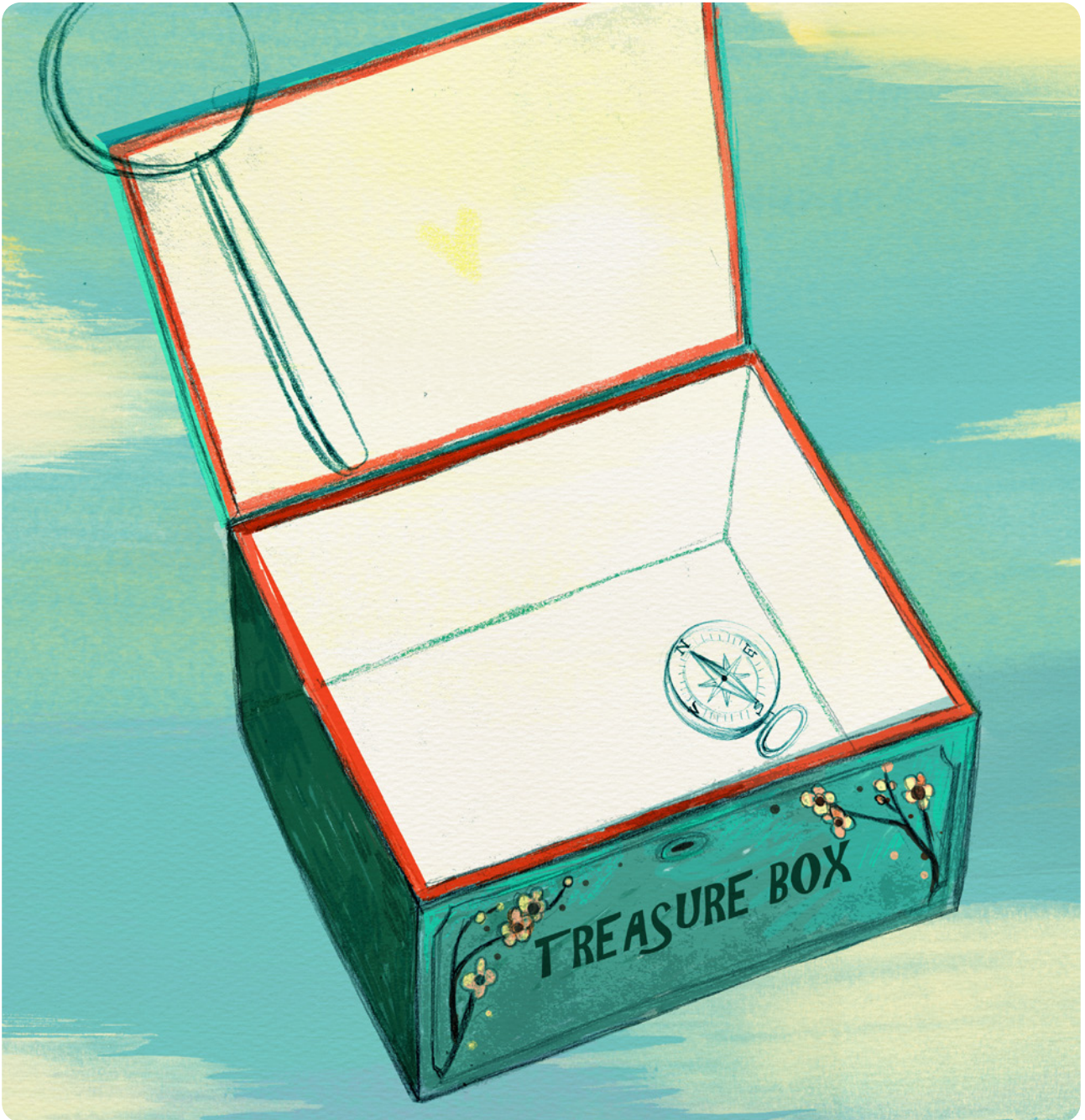
Draw or write about new things you learned in the past weeks about nature, about people, about things that surround you!

EXERCISE: Finish the following sentences!

“In the future I’m really excited to...”

“When I grow up, I want to be...”

“There are some things in the past that I didn’t really appreciate, but now I find them important, for example...”



TOOL: Make a treasure box!

Find an empty box or bag, and start searching for exciting, beautiful, strange little things in your surroundings! Observe them carefully, maybe even start writing a diary about them! Write down why you picked them up, what you found interesting, exciting or strange about them. Do they remind you of anything? What do you feel when you look at them or hold them?

Make a drawing above about the first treasure you collected, and write down why you think it's special!



Day 7.

The day came when Syla asked the twins to sit by the huge oak tree, and she landed close to them, on the top of the white magic mitten.

“I have learned so much from you,” she said. “And I hope I could teach you some exciting new tools and exercises, too. Don’t forget: they are yours forever! If you practice them every day and learn how to do them, no one can take these away from you! Whenever you feel sad, or angry, or low in energy, you can always use these tools to give your body a break, to understand and befriend your big feelings, and to shift your attention from unhelpful red thoughts to helpful green thoughts! Now it’s time for me to visit other children and teach them the same ideas and exercises,” she said.

When the twins realized that the little bird was about to leave, huge teardrops appeared in their eyes, running down their cheeks. “Please don’t go away!” they said, with a lot of sorrow in their voices. So, Syla flew up to their faces, touching their cheeks softly with her wings.

“I know that saying goodbye is always difficult, but I’m not leaving for good! I will come back and visit you from time to time! You are my family now, and I would love to know more about you while I’m away! Will you write to me?” she asked with a warm chatter.

“Of course, we will!” Andriy replied. “Every week!” Anna added quickly.

“I can’t express how grateful I am for that!” Syla said warmly, while her voice was also full of sorrow. “Before I leave, why don’t we do the Helping Hand together again? It would help me to leave in a good spirit,” she said, and the twins were happy to do that.

“What’s up? What’s going on in my life right now?” she asked herself. “I have to depart and say goodbye to two amazing children, who became a part of my heart,” she replied, going on to the second question.



“What are my feelings right now? I am a bit nervous about the change, sad because I have to depart, moved by the love I feel from both of you, and excited about the new adventures waiting for me,” she continued.

“What are my red thoughts? One of my red thoughts is that I won’t see you for a long time. And that it will be difficult not to see your cute faces every morning. Another red thought is that I will face many challenges on my route,” Sylva said with a frown.

“What are my green thoughts?” she continued. The thought that I’m lucky to have met you, and that I got two new amazing friends, who will be my friends forever, no matter where I am! Also, I feel blessed to be able to keep on travelling and helping children all over the world!”

“What can I do to feel better?” she went on. “I can decide to write a letter to you every time I miss you! I can also ask you to write me a letter whenever you miss me! I can think of our great moments together when I will be on my way, high up in the sky,” she spoke emotionally.

“Who can support me?” she asked eventually. “You, Anna and Andriy, and all the sweet, loving children I meet along my way.” She finished the exercise with a smile and a small teardrop in her eye, moved by how lucky she felt to be able to make all these amazing friendships around the world.



TOOL: Practice the Helping Hand again!

1. What's up? What's going on right now in my life?
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After the twins did the exercise, Sylva flew one last loop around them. “There is a final present I would like to give you,” she said. “Here is the magic mitten! I leave this here for you!” she said happily, picking up the mitten from the ground with her beak, placing it into the palms of the twins. “Whenever you feel you need support, just put your hand into the warmth of the mitten, and feel the magic wonderful power of it running through your fingers, up in your arms, all the way to your heart! When you feel that warm, cozy, safe sensation around your heart, you will know that I am present, I am here with you in that very moment, and as a matter of fact I never left, as I live in your heart, in your mind, in your thoughts, in your dreams! I love you!” she said, touching the cheeks of Anna and Andriy, then flying high up into the beautiful, blue sky, which has no borders.

EXERCISE: WRITE A LETTER TO SYLA!

Tell her what is happening to you, how you feel, what you have learned about yourself, others, and the world, and what your plans are.

Write a letter to her every week, and she will read it from the sky!



