

Origin Story

by David Larsen

(with fairy)



“Hello,” said the superhero fairy. “I’m the superhero fairy.”

“That’s the most ridiculous thing I’ve ever heard,” Moana did not say. The words came into her head as a good reply, but she was distracted by the way the oncoming truck and the two-year-old and the street had all vanished. And by the fact that she couldn’t move.

“You’re probably wondering why you can’t move,” said the superhero fairy. It was unclear whether it was a female fairy or a male one. It was slender and long-haired and wore a sparkly blue leotard thing with striped leggings and a red cape. It had pointy ears. It was hovering in mid-air, surrounded by a riot of rainbow flecks of light. Moana didn’t know how she knew all this. The fairy was off to one side, and she couldn’t move her head to look at it. She couldn’t even move her eyes. The swarming lights were all around her as well.

“This is your origin story!” said the fairy. “It’s very exciting! Let’s do a flashback.”

The sleeting rainbow colours cleared. Moana still couldn’t move or even feel her body. It was like a movie was being projected into her head. She saw the street again, but this time from above and from a distance, as though she were standing on a platform in the sky. The usual after-school traffic was whooshing by. “An ordinary day,” announced the fairy. “Or is it?”

On the far side of the road, a large red ball came bouncing down a driveway. A little boy came charging after it. There was a truck a few car lengths down the road, going a little bit faster than it should. A girl was walking past on the nearer side of the road. She was in Moana’s school uniform. She had Moana’s face. “An ordinary girl!” proclaimed the fairy. “Or is she?”

Moana knew what would happen next because it had happened already. Less than a minute ago. The little boy ran after his ball. The ball bounced onto the road. The little boy didn’t look, and so he didn’t see the truck. Moana saw herself see it and start to run: an instant, headlong, hopeless dash. The truck’s brakes squealed. It had no chance of stopping in time. The Moana from a minute ago barely missed being hit by a car as she sprinted towards the boy. She had no chance, either. The image froze.

“What do you think happens next?” asked the fairy.

Moana still couldn’t move, and she still couldn’t speak. The fairy floated around to stand in front of the scene. For the first time, Moana noticed that it was only about 20 centimetres tall.

“What happens next,” said the fairy, “is a choose-your-own-adventure sort of thing. Watch.” It floated out of Moana’s field of view. “Go,” it said into her ear.

The image unfroze. Moana saw herself and the little boy vanish. They were there, and then they were gone. The truck slewed from side to side and skidded to a halt, horn blaring. The cars behind it stopped. Drivers jumped out and ran around the truck. They were searching, Moana realised slowly, for the bodies of the two children they assumed the truck had hit.

“Now in slomo,” said the fairy. “Watch carefully.”

The image reset. Frozen little boy, frozen looming truck, frozen running Moana. “Go,” whispered the fairy.

Moana saw herself whip over the road and up the driveway opposite and out of sight: gone in a blink. The little boy was gone, too. The truck had not moved.



“Again,” said the fairy. The image reset. “Twenty times slower.”

Moana saw herself run, faster than any normal person could run, but only by a little. She saw herself bend, scoop up the little boy, and carry him over the road and up the driveway. There was a garage at the end of the driveway. Its roller door was closed. She saw herself run right up the door, onto the roof of the garage, and out of sight.

“Bam!” yelled the fairy. “Super-speed, baby!” It floated in front of Moana’s face and leant in slightly. Its expression was abruptly stern. “Now all you have to do is tell me how you did it.”

The street, the cars, the truck, and the people all dissolved. Moana and the fairy were floating alone in the middle of the rainbow blizzard of lights. She found she could speak. “This is crazy!” she yelled. “How are you doing this?”

“Yes!” said the fairy. “Exactly the question!”

“Then answer it!”

“Superheroes,” said the fairy seriously, “are impossible. Ridiculous, crazy, impossible.”

“No they’re not! They’re real! Catman! The Baroness! Alligator Woman and Sidekick Girl!”

“Great, aren’t they?” said the fairy. “Some of my best work.”

Moana was incensed. “They’re nothing to do with you! Catman is the world’s greatest detective! The Baroness is the last survivor of a lost alien world! Alligator Woman –”

“Was bitten by a mutant alligator and gained shape-shifting powers,” said the fairy. “Yes, I know. I tried to talk her into a less painful origin story, but she’s all about the drama. We’ll go with something a bit simpler for you, I hope.”

The chaotic dance of the little motes of light seemed to be slowing.

“This is crazy,” Moana whispered.

“No, what’s crazy is super-speed,” said the fairy. “If you ran as fast as you just saw yourself run, the acceleration would slosh your brain against the back of your skull so hard you’d die. When you grabbed that poor little boy, the bones in your hands would shatter. For him, the impact would be just the same as being hit by the truck. And the air could not slide out of your way fast enough. It would be like trying to run through a hurricane. Super-speed is impossible.”

“Then how ...,” began Moana. The lights were definitely slowing.

“You ran straight into traffic to save someone you had no hope of saving,” said the fairy. “You could easily have been killed. My job is to pick heroes. I’m picking you. But first you have to explain to me how your powers make sense and how you got them. Those are the rules.”

“Rules?”

“Everything has rules. You won’t remember this conversation by the way. No one ever does. And you only have until the lights stop moving. Then you’ll be back on the street, and the little boy will get hit by the truck. Or you can save him.” The fairy smiled brightly. “It’s important for a hero to be able to think well under pressure, I’m sure you agree.”

“OK,” said Moana. “What if ...?” Her mind was a blank. The lights were separating into large blocks of colour; still moving, but far slower, and in a pattern now. Slower ... “Wait, I know! My power isn’t running fast – it’s slowing time! Everything else slows down, and I move normally!”

The fairy looked impressed. “Good!” it said. “That’s exactly the flavour of ridiculous we need. How did you run up the garage door?”

The pattern of the lights was starting to look like a mosaic. It looked familiar. It looked like a very fuzzy version of the street. "When I slow time down, gravity has less time to affect me?"

"Makes no sense at all, but sounds as though it ought to," said the fairy. "I love it! And how did you get these powers?"

The street mosaic was coming into focus. The little boy was a metre in front of the truck, arms reaching for his ball. "I met one of the secret forces of the universe, and it promised me power if I used it only for good!" said Moana.

"But ...," said the fairy. "But that's exactly what did happen."

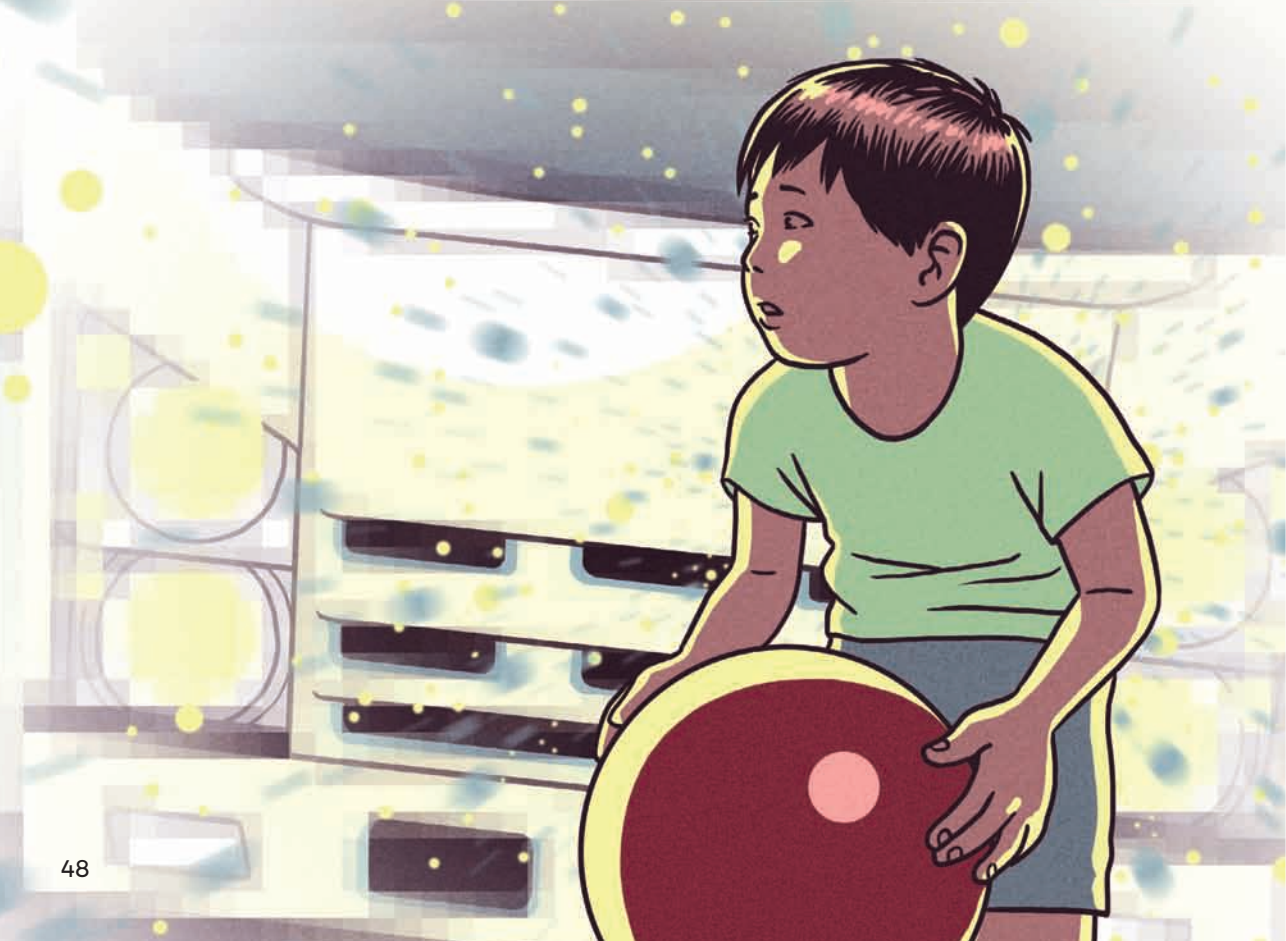
"I know!"

The fairy looked outraged. Then it looked thoughtful. Then it started to laugh and, laughing, it faded slowly away.

Moana was standing in the middle of the street. The cars, the truck, and the little boy were motionless around her.

She began to run.

illustrations by Ross Murray



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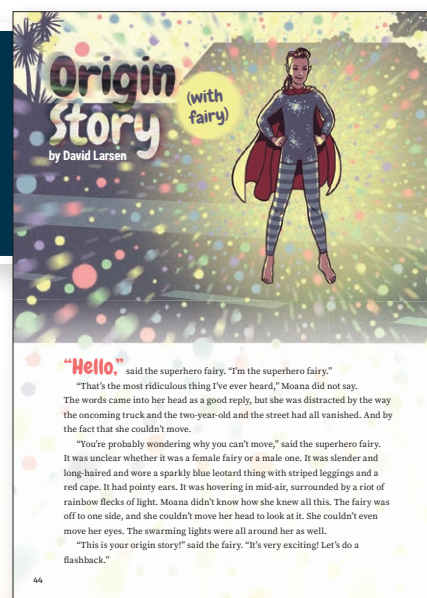
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