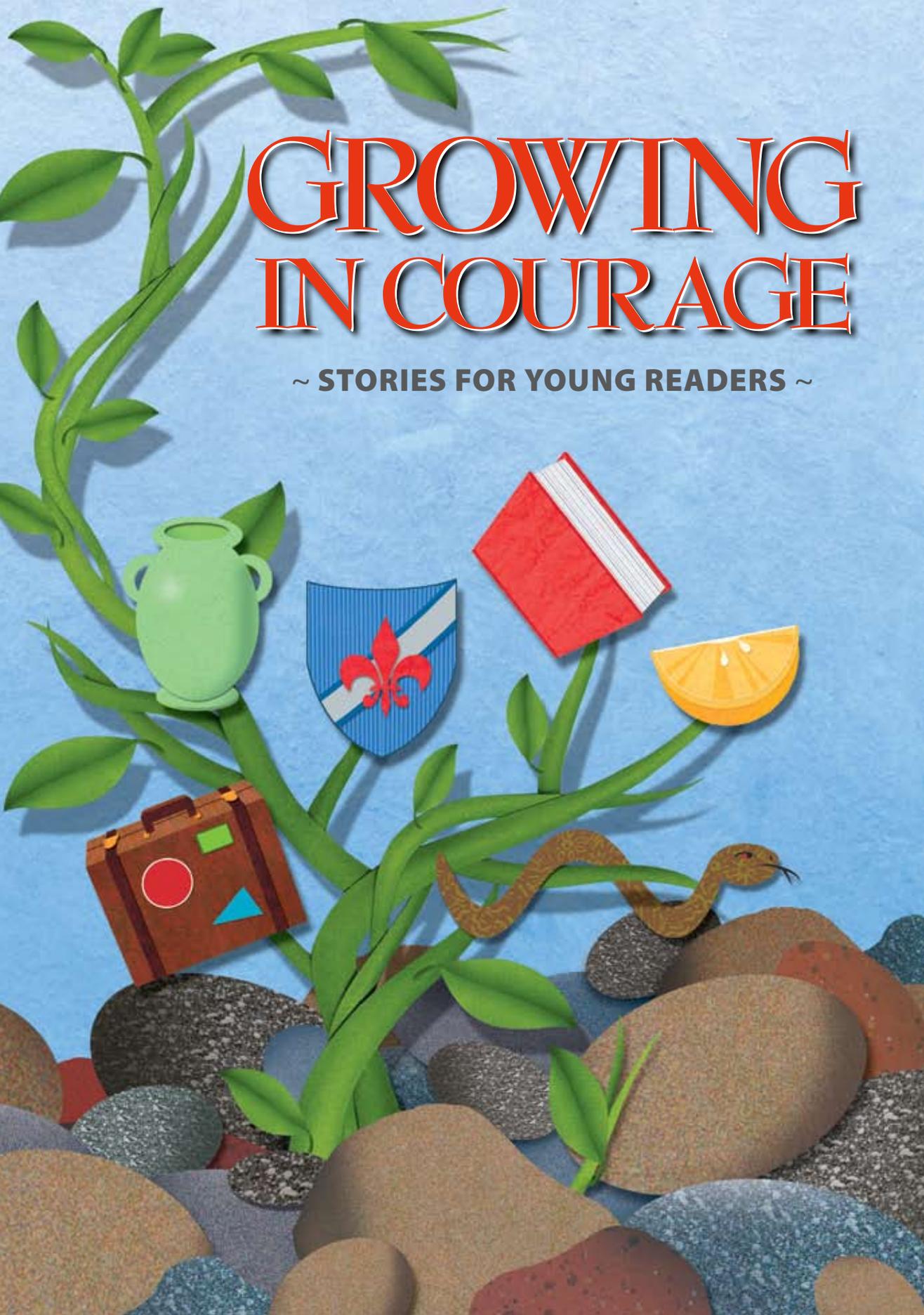


GROWING IN COURAGE

~ STORIES FOR YOUNG READERS ~



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Selected by Pamela Pollack



Bureau of International Information Programs

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

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INTRODUCTION



What is children's or young adult literature? The answer is: Any story or characters created for an audience under adult age. Usually, members of this audience are beginning to face choices and issues that will determine their future — their work, their relationships, their standing in the community. These young readers also are developing the skills and traits that will turn them into responsible, productive adults. The best of young adult literature deals with these concerns.

The books excerpted here are all written by American authors, but the stories they tell exemplify values that are shared by many societies in the world today. They all feature young protagonists in the process of finding their own personal strength and courage. Courage is the quality or trait that enables a person to face difficulty, danger, or adversity without giving up.

Courage is not just about doing daring things. Courage is often quiet and involves personal sacrifice; sometimes, courage is not abandoning others when they need you. Sometimes forgiving others takes courage. Sometimes it takes courage just to survive.

This anthology includes many different heroes facing a wide range of situations. They come from different countries and even different times in history. They are a mix of different genders and races and speak different languages. But they are all determined to make a life for themselves on their own terms.

The books that tell their stories were all written in the past 20 years, from *Shabanu*, *Daughter of the Wind*, published in 1989, to *Letters From the Corrugated Castle*, published in 2007. Most of these titles have won awards, including the Newbery Medal, awarded every year to the “most distinguished contribution to American literature” by the leading association of American librarians.

Although the settings of the books range from deserts to battlefields, from the tropical jungles to the Hawaiian Islands, from medieval manor houses to modern housing projects, from the suburbs to a federal prison, patterns of courage emerge.

Personal Courage

Taking responsibility for your own actions and facing up to your own mistakes and fears require personal courage. In *Letters From the Corrugated Castle: A Novel of Gold Rush California, 1850-1852* by Joan Bloss, it is only

when Eldora admits that she feels abandoned and unwanted by her mother that the two can have an honest conversation about the past. She is able to listen to her mother's own story and forgive her.

Jolly, the 17-year-old mother of two in *Make Lemonade* by Virginia Euwer Wolff, has been born into a life of "ignorance and bad luck." Now, with two children depending on her, she must learn to "take hold." That means taking steps that are scary to her, such as finishing secondary school and learning to accept help from people who intimidate her. In a world where few people will help her, she has to help herself.

Jack Gantos writes his real life story in *Hole in My Life*. After his own mistakes land him in jail, he faces a choice: continue to make bad decisions or take real steps to building a future. He must face the fact that many of the bad things other people have said about him are true and that he must work to become the man he wants to be.

Catherine, in *Catherine, Called Birdy* by Karen Cushman, sacrifices the life that she wants to save an innocent animal. Forced into a marriage she doesn't want, Catherine knows she will be able to survive as long as she remains true to herself and what she values. That can never be taken away from her if she doesn't allow it. Nor will she lose her sense of humor, another source of bravery.

Fighting Back

Characters sometimes face forces greater than themselves. They might want to run and hide from them. But they also have things more important to them than themselves. This helps them not only to stand their ground but to fight for what they believe in.

The hero of *Code Talker* by Joseph Bruchac, Ned Begay, is a Navajo Marine. When his platoon lands on the island of Iwo Jima, his duty is to stand his ground against the armed enemy all around him. As a code talker, Ned is responsible for keeping communication open between commanders and soldiers, so as to protect his fellow Marines. "As the battle for Iwo Jima raged all around us," he recalls, "our voices held it together."

Julian Singh, an Indian boy in E.L. Konigsburg's *The View From Saturday*, faces a more personal enemy. Hamilton Knapp is the class bully. Normally Julian tries to avoid him, but today Ham is planning a mean trick on Ginger, a dog belonging to Julian's friend Nadia. Julian not only stops Hamilton's trick but doesn't play a trick in return.

Shabanu, the heroine of *Shabanu, Daughter of the Wind* by Suzanne Fisher Staples, is the daughter of camel-herders in the Cholistan desert in Pakistan. Death is everywhere in the desert, but when a poisonous snake brings down one of her camels, she must deliver the camel's baby and protect it from attacking vultures.

Survival

Imagine living in a harsh world where you're all alone and must fight for the most basic things you need: food, water, shelter. You must protect yourself against the cold, the heat, and wild animals that are also trying to survive. Characters in this situation confront the question of how badly they want to live.

The 12-year-old heroine of *A Girl Named Disaster* by Nancy Farmer, Nhamo, must survive on her own. Nhamo is a Shona from Mozambique in Africa, traveling in a leaky boat on Lake Cabora Bassa. Will she survive drowning, starvation, or attack to make it to Zimbabwe?

Perilous Journey

The word “journey” calls to mind adventures and exploration. Out on their own on the open road or water, characters must keep their eye on their destination. They have a mission they must fulfill. The mission is important enough for them to leave their home and everything familiar and venture into the unknown. When they reach their destination, they find wisdom to bring home.

Bud, the 10-year-old title character of *Bud, Not Buddy* by Christopher Paul Curtis, has never really had a home. Since the death of his mother, he’s lived in orphanages and foster homes. Now he sets out to find the father he’s never known. As an African-American boy out on the road in 1936, he sees Hooverilles (shantytowns named after U.S. President Herbert Hoover, whom many people blamed for the Great Depression), homeless families, and soup lines. But with a quick mind and a quick wit, Bud won’t quit until he’s reached his destination and learned all he can learn about the world.

In *Under the Blood-Red Sun* by Graham Salisbury, Japanese-American Tomi Nakaji’s peaceful world is destroyed when the Japanese bomb Pearl Harbor. His father is arrested and held on Sand Island as a suspected spy. Tomi is warned not to go near the island, which is guarded by soldiers with guns, but he is determined to see his father. He must know that

he is still alive. So he swims the stormy harbor to the forbidden prison camp.

In Korean-American author Linda Sue Park’s *A Single Shard*, Tree-ear, a 13-year-old orphan in Medieval Korea, has become loyal to his stern but brilliant master potter, Min. When the emperor offers Min a chance to win a royal commission, Tree-ear is determined that his master should win the honor. But Min is too old to make the journey to the emperor’s palace, so Tree-ear offers to go alone. He must walk many days on a dangerous road to bring the two delicate vases to the palace, though he has never before left his own little village. When disaster strikes and the vases are broken, he must make the most important decision of his life: Should he go on or return home a failure?

Even if you never have to journey to the emperor’s palace, or survive in the African jungle, or fight in a war, stories of courage inspire all of us and show what ordinary people can do when they must.

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A Single Shard

By Linda Sue Park



Korean-American novelist **Linda Sue Park** won the Newbery Medal for *A Single Shard*. She loves to write about Korea and its history — her parents are both Korean immigrants. Her first published writing was when she was nine years old and sold a poem to a magazine. She was paid a dollar, which she gave to her father for Christmas. A year later the magazine wrote to her, asking her to cash the check they had sent. Her father had framed it and hung it on his wall. It's still there today. Linda Sue Park's books often feature details about Korean culture, such as kite fighting, embroidery, silkworms, and, in *A Single Shard*, celadon pottery.

A Single Shard takes place during the 12th century. Tree-ear is an orphan who lives under a bridge with his friend Crane-man, who has taken care of him ever since he was a small boy. Crane-man is the only family Tree-ear knows. What Tree-ear longs to do is make the famous celadon pottery for which his village is famous. But that is impossible. The only people who are taken as potters' apprentices are sons of the potters themselves.

Still, Tree-ear can't stay away from Min, the best potter in the village, who works slowly and deliberately. Once, when Min is not at home, Tree-ear sneaks into his house to look more closely at his work. Surprised when the potter returns home, he breaks a piece. Tree-ear begs to make it up to Min by working for him. He's hoping Min will teach him how to make pottery, but instead Tree-ear finds himself chopping wood and cutting slabs of clay from the quarry by the river.

Min's wife is kind and takes a liking to Tree-ear. When she notices he only eats half of the lunch she makes him in order to take the other half home to Crane-man, she starts refilling

his bowl secretly. Although Min is harsh and demanding, Tree-ear begins to feel loyal to him. When emissaries from the emperor come to assign pottery commissions for the palace — every potter's dream — Tree-ear is determined to help Min win the position.

But a rival potter has invented a way to make new colors with his pottery. Min does not think he can compete, but Tree-ear has been watching the other man and helps him figure out the secret. Unfortunately, Min is unable to make a pot to show the royal emissary that is up to Min's high standards. The emissary gives Min a chance to win the commission. He can make a pot using the new technique and bring it to the palace.

Min thinks he is too old to make the journey, and Tree-ear offers to go in his place. He has never left the village before. Crane-man advises him to take the journey one day at a time, never thinking beyond the next village, the next day's walk.

When Tree-ear stops at the Rock of the Falling Flowers, he meets two strangers who threaten to keep him from completing his mission.



A Single Shard

Chapter 11

The path to the Rock of the Falling Flowers was steep, and Tree-ear leaned forward, sometimes on all fours, as he climbed. Just before he reached the top, he stopped by the side of the path and took the jiggeh¹ off his back. He drank from the gourd and poured a little water on his hands to splash on his sweaty face.

Thus refreshed, he felt ready to give his full attention to the sight of the rock. He walked the

last incline holding the jiggeh awkwardly in front of him and set it down once he reached the broad plateau at the top.

It was as if he stood alone on top of the world. He gazed around, this way and that, hardly knowing where to look first. Before him to the north the cliff fell away sharply to the Kum River, a broad stroke of silver ribboning its way through the hills and plains. Behind him was the path he had climbed, with the city of Puyo below. How small it looked now! Tree-ear shaded his eyes from the sun as it began to set, wondering if that smudge on the horizon might be the sea. Surely this cliff was high enough to see all the way there.

Crane-man's words came to life — the king standing where Tree-ear stood now, surrounded by the palace women ... the enemy scrambling up the path he had just followed ... the cries of the women — their terror and then their sudden act of bravery, their colored dresses like the petals of thousands of flowers.

"You know the story, eh?" The voice at his side startled Tree-ear; he felt his heart leap and run. He had not heard the man come up the path, but there he stood, poorly dressed and oddly pale, as if he had been ill for a long time or never went outdoors when the sun shone.

Tree-ear cleared his throat. "Greetings, sir. Have you eaten well today?"

"Not today, not for a few days now," came the impolite answer. The man smiled, but Tree-ear did not like his smile. There was something unpleasant behind it. Although he would have preferred to stay at the rock a while longer, he decided to descend rather than remain in unwanted company.

Tree-ear turned and picked up his jiggeh, preparing to hoist it to his back.

"Let me help you with that," the man said, moving forward. "A fine load of rice indeed!"

Tree-ear stepped back, trying to quell his alarm. His cargo was far more precious than rice. "Your offer is kind, good sir, but I have no need of help."

The man's smile turned into a leer. "Now there is a rude boy — my help is no good to you?" And he reached out with one arm to grab the jiggeh.

Tree-ear jerked it away from him. He stumbled, coming dangerously near the edge of the cliff. The man snarled, menacing and ugly, and advanced a few steps. He seized the sides of the straw container with both hands and pulled.

In the last moments everything had come together in Tree-ear's mind. The man's pallor ... his rudeness ... his coming upon Tree-ear in such a deserted place. He was one of the dreaded toduk-non, the bandits who hid throughout the countryside and on the outskirts of cities, emerging only to rob weary travelers. Tree-ear held on to the wooden frame of the jiggeh with all his might.

The robber pulled and jerked; Crane-man's solid straw work held. At one point, the man released one hand, cursing — the straw had cut into his palm. Tree-ear's hands were toughened by calluses from ax and spade, his arms strengthened by endless work; he gave not a single step of ground to the robber.

Be careful! A scream of warning sounded in Tree-ear's head. You are pulling so hard. If he lets go suddenly, you will fall! Move, move now, so your back is not to the cliff edge!

Tree-ear shifted his feet and began edging sideways. Still the robber pulled, now shouting curses and threats with every breath. Soon, Tree-ear's back was to the path. His hands and

arms felt like iron — they would never break, he would never let go. The robber was weakening, he could feel it.

Tree-ear stared into the robber's face; hatred would give him more strength. And it did, too; silently he swore to himself that this dog of a man would never win the jiggeh with its priceless contents.

The man stared back at him, his face contorted in an evil grimace. But suddenly he laughed and released the container. Tree-ear collapsed backwards — into the arms of another man who had stolen up the path behind him.

A second robber.

Against two, Tree-ear could do nothing. The second man pinned his arms back, while the first strode forward and wrenched the jiggeh away. Tree-ear kicked and struggled. His head crashed into the chin of his captor, who swore in pain; the other robber reached out and slapped Tree-ear's face viciously.

"Stop your struggle, worthless one," he said. "We mean only to rob you, but it would not be past us to harm you if you prove too much trouble."

While his companion kept Tree-ear pinioned, the first robber quickly opened the straw container. He threw aside the packing of straw and silk, growing angrier with each handful.

"Not rice! What is it you are carrying, idiot-boy?" At last, he drew out the first of the vases and his face grew purple with fury.

"Useless!" He screamed, gripping the mouth of the vase with one hand and waving it about. Tree-ear caught his breath with fear.

"We might sell it," said the second robber more calmly.

"Have you no eyes in your head?" his companion shouted back. "Look at it — can't you see, this could only be a gift for the palace! Nobody would dare buy it from us!"

"Keep looking. Perhaps there is something more."

The robber set the first vase down on the ground and returned to his search of the container. With more muttered curses, he pulled out the second vessel and threw a final handful of straw on the ground.

"Nothing!" he screamed. "All the way up this hill — and nothing!"

His companion had shifted his grip and now had one arm across Tree-ear's throat, throttling him so he could barely breathe. With his other hand he pawed roughly at Tree-ear's waist pouch.

"Eh — here is something to cheer you up!" He held the pouch in his free hand and emptied the contents onto the ground. The flint stones and the little clay turtle fell out, followed by a string of coins.

"Something, anyway," grumbled the first robber, scooping up the coins. He kicked the jiggeh out of his way and headed down the path. "Come — we've wasted enough time here."

Tree-ear breathed a silent prayer of thanks. Take the money — take anything. Just leave the vases alone. ...

The second robber laughed. "Wait," he said. "Come hold this donkey for a moment."

The first robber retraced his steps. "What is it?" he asked impatiently, grabbing Tree-ear by the arms from behind.

"A little fun, as long as we're up here."

The robber picked up one of the vases. He stepped to the edge of the cliff — and flung it into the air. Peering over the edge, he put his hand to his ear in a pose of listening. After an agony of silence, the crash of pottery was heard on the rocks far below.

The second robber laughed again. "One more!" he said in a jovial voice.

"No!" Tree-ear screamed, an inhuman screech of utter desperation. The robber holding him lifted him off his feet and slammed him to the ground so hard that his breath left him. And Tree-ear could only watch as the second vase sailed through the air. With a yelp like a wounded dog, he put his hands over his ears so he would not hear the crash.

Tree-ear rolled onto his side and vomited. He retched again and again, until his stomach felt as empty as his spirit. Shakily, he rose to his feet and bent over double, his hands on his knees. Failure. The most dishonorable failure. He had been unable to keep the vases safe; Puyo was not even halfway to Songdo. If he had reached his destination and the work had been rejected by the court, at least he would have done his part.

He raised his head slowly and stared at the edge of the cliff. He thought of returning to Min with this news, and his whole body shuddered. Nothing could be worse. He straightened up and took a few steps toward the edge.

What would it be like? To leap off and sail through the air as those women had — like flying, like a bird, so free. And time would feel different. Those few moments would feel like hours, surely.

But just then he heard Crane-man's voice so clearly that he turned in surprise. "Leaping into death is not the only way to show true courage." No one was there, of course. Tree-ear stepped back from the edge, ashamed. He knew it was true; it would take far more courage to face Min. He thought of his promise to Ajima, and besides, Crane-man was waiting for him. It was his duty to return.

He picked up his waist pouch and put the flint stones and the turtle back inside. Then he untied the few items from the jiggeh. There was one pair of sandals; he had donned the other spare pair the day before. The food bag still held a few rice cakes, but Tree-ear felt that he would never be able to eat again.

He tucked the pouch back under his tunic and slung the sandals, the food bag, and the drinking gourd over one shoulder. Then he stood for a few moments staring at nothing. Gradually, the empty straw container came into focus before him. With a sudden cry of fury, Tree-ear picked up the jiggeh and threw it, container and all, over the edge of the cliff. He watched its descent; it did not fall cleanly into the water but bounced several times off the rocks on its way down.

Tree-ear turned and began to run. He ran blindly down the mountain path, heedless of the rocks and shrubs. Several times he fell but was on his feet again in the next breath, stumbling, tripping, skidding in a headlong descent. When at last he reached the point where the path leveled out, he fell hard onto his face, the dirt mixing with his tears. His teeth cut into his top lip and he spat blood. The pain was welcome; he deserved far worse.

Tree-ear sat up and wiped his face with the edge of his tunic, hearing nothing but the sound of his own panting and the rushing river nearby. Suddenly, a last flicker of hope flared within him. The second vase — he had not heard the crash. Perhaps it had fallen into the water, perhaps it was still unbroken.

Tree-ear made his way around the base of the cliff to the river. Boulders blocked the way to a narrow strip of sand, with more rocks beyond. He looked up the sheer face of the cliff as it rose far above him and tried to guess where the vases might have fallen. Then he began scrambling over the boulders.

Thorny shrubs grew among the rocks. Sometimes they massed into a wall so thick that he had to scramble down to the water's edge and wade to make further progress. If the vases had fallen among those shrubs, he would never be able to find them.

That small mass on the sand up ahead, not as dark as the rocks — could that be a vase? Tree-ear made his awkward way over the stony ground, barking his shin once but hardly feeling the pain in his eagerness.

No. A pile of pebbles.

For a long time, he made his way back and forth between the cliff and the river, up and down over the rocks and sand. He had nearly given up hope when he came upon a little mound of shards.

They would probably never have been noticed by a casual passerby; so thoroughly smashed was the vessel that the fragments were no bigger than pebbles. Tree-ear crouched and touched them gingerly. The first vase, he hoped with all his might.

He stood and looked around. The thief had thrown both vases from the same spot on a cliff; the other one should be somewhere nearby. At the river's edge, Tree-ear saw something on the sand. He approached it slowly, telling himself it was probably another pile of pebbles or a piece of driftwood.

It was the second vase. The force of its fall had driven it into the sand — in a hundred pieces.

Tree-ear dropped to his knees. Fool, he thought bitterly. Fool, to hope that it could have survived such a fall.

The second vase, its fall cushioned however slightly by the sand, had broken into bigger pieces. The largest shard was the size of his palm. Tree-ear picked up this piece and swished it through the water to rinse off the sand.

Across one side of the shard ran a shallow groove, evidence of the vase's melon shape. Part of an inlaid peony blossom with its stem and leaves twined along the groove. And the glaze still shone clear and pure, untouched by the violence that had just been done it.

A sharp edge of the shard bit into Tree-ear's palm. The pain was an echo — he remembered now. It was when he had thrown the shard from the first batch of ruined vases into the river in Ch'ulp'o. How long ago it seemed!

Suddenly, Tree-ear raised his head. He stood up and squared his shoulders, still clutching the piece of pottery. He laid the shard carefully on a flat stone. He took the clay turtle from his waist pouch and squeezed it back into a ball. Next he rolled the clay between his palms until it formed a long snake. Picking up the shard again, he pinched the snake all the way around the sharp edge to protect it.

Tree-ear removed the flint stones from his waist pouch; they might scratch the shard. He tied them into one corner of his tunic, then put the clay-bound shard into the pouch. Holding the pouch clear of the boulders with one hand, he climbed back to the path.

His every movement was quick with purpose; to hesitate was to doubt. He had made up his mind: He would journey on to Songdo and show the emissary the single shard.

Chapter 12

The next several days passed in a steady blur. Tree-ear walked and walked. The sun shone; he walked. Rain poured; he walked. From sunrise until dark he walked without stopping, drinking from the gourd along the way.

If dark found him near a village, he slept outside a house and accepted whatever was offered in the way of food. If there was no village, he slept in a ditch by the side of the road or under a tree in the forest. He ate perhaps once every two days, feeling no need of food but knowing that without it he could not complete the journey.

Only once did he pause. A low range of mountains made a bowl of a valley cut through by a beautiful river. After crossing the valley, Tree-ear stopped on a peak at the far side and looked back. He knew that the scene must be even lovelier than it looked to him, viewed as it was through a fog of exhaustion that blurred his senses and his mind. Perhaps on the way back he would appreciate it more.

Three days' walk north of this valley brought him to Songdo.

Songdo was like Puyo, only more so — more people, more buildings, more traffic. The palace was in the center of the city, towering over the other structures.

Tree-ear did not stop walking. Every step brought him closer to the palace. Once he shuffled sideways to avoid a woman with a toddler tied to her back. The toddler was crying over some unknown disappointment, and the sound of his cries drew Tree-ear's attention. He watched as the mother comforted the child by rhythmically bouncing up and down and crooning to him.

For just a moment Tree-ear was distracted. He had been such a child once, right here in Songdo. He had lived here with his parents — a father and a mother. Perhaps his mother had comforted him in the same way when he had cried. Perhaps somewhere, in one of the temples, there was a monk who knew about his parents, who remembered sending him to Ch'ulp'o.

Tree-ear sighed and looked back out on the street. The noise of the traffic seemed to press in on his ears, on his very body. Everywhere there were people hurrying about. There must be dozens of temples in the mountains surrounding Songdo; even if Tree-ear could find that monk, it was likely that he would no longer remember. He might even be dead by now.

It was useless to wonder. Tree-ear turned his mind back to his task.

Late in the afternoon Tree-ear made his steady way through the crowds and found the main gate of the palace. Two soldiers stood guard there.

He spoke firmly. "I have an appointment with the royal emissary for pottery ware," he said, for that was Emissary Kim's full title. He made a dignified bow.

The guards looked at Tree-ear, then at each other. Tree-ear could read their thoughts — This scrawny scarecrow of a child claims a royal appointment? But he felt no trembling now; his calm did not even surprise him. He was expected. He had the right to be there.

His manner must have said as much, for one of the guards vanished beyond the gate. He was gone long enough for the other guard to shift impatiently, but Tree-ear did not budge. He stood proudly, his eyes never leaving the gate.

At last the guard returned, followed by another man. It was not Emissary Kim, but he was garbed in a similar robe, wearing a different hat — some kind of official of lower rank than Kim. He, too, looked skeptically at Tree-ear.

“Yes?” he inquired, his politeness edged with impatience.

Tree-ear bowed again. “I have an appointment with Emissary Kim. I am here on behalf of Potter Min from Ch’ulp’o.”

The official raised his eyebrows slightly. “Yes, all right. Where is the work? I will take it to Emissary Kim, and you may return for his answer in a few days.”

Tree-ear paused before he spoke. “I do not wish to displease the honorable gentleman, but I will not show what I have brought to anyone but the emissary.” He drew in a silent breath to quell the small nudge of anxiety that was rising within him; so far he had not been forced to lie.

The official looked annoyed. “Emissary Kim is a very busy man. I do not wish to disturb him when he could view the work at his convenience.”

“Then I will wait for his convenience,” said Tree-ear. He looked directly at the man. “Emissary Kim has specifically requested that Potter Min’s work be brought to him. I do not wish him to be disappointed.”

His message was clear to the official. “I understand,” the man said crossly, “but surely you do not expect to see him without showing him the work. Where is it?”

“I will discuss its whereabouts with no one but the emissary.”

The official muttered under his breath and finally seemed to make up his mind. He nodded to the guards. The gate swung open and Tree-ear stepped inside the royal courtyard.

Inside the gate lay another small city. Buildings lined the walls and across a wide stretch of open courtyard Tree-ear could see the

grandest of them all — the palace proper. Tree-ear nearly tripped as he walked with his neck craned and his eyes wide; he had never before seen a building more than one story high.

And wonder of wonders, the palace had celadon roof tiles.

Tree-ear stopped walking. He had heard of these roof tiles. Years ago, before his time, potters in Ch’ulp’o had been engaged in the enormous task of making those very tiles. “Wasters,” the rejects, could still be found around the kiln site. How Tree-ear wished he could somehow climb the walls and examine the tiles more closely! Even from where he stood he could make out their intricate relief work.

All sorts of people went about their business — tradesmen and soldiers and officials and many monks. Reluctantly, Tree-ear turned his attention away from the tiles and caught up with his escort. The official led the way deeper into the palace grounds. He stopped at last before a building against the outer wall and gestured for Tree-ear to wait outside.

After a few moments the official returned and beckoned Tree-ear. Tree-ear walked through an entryway into a small room — small, but lovely. Shelves along one wall held celadon vessels; Tree-ear could see at a glance that each piece was of the highest quality. The official who had led him in moved to stand at one side of the door in the stance of an assistant.

Emissary Kim sat at a low wooden table. He was writing rapidly on a scroll, the brush racing across the paper, leaving behind a trail of perfectly formed characters. Tree-ear could not read, but he could see the skill of Kim’s calligraphy.

Kim wiped the brush carefully on the inkstone. He picked up the scroll and carried it to a shelf where it would dry. Then he returned to the table and sat again. He folded his arms and looked at Tree-ear.

Tree-ear bowed low. As he bent down, his courage suddenly fled, leaving his knees as weak as reeds. I must be hungry, he thought as he straightened his body, incredulous that he could think of such a thing at such a moment.

"You are here from Ch'ulp'o. From Potter Min," the emissary stated.

"Yes, honorable sir."

The emissary waited. "Well?" he said. "Where is the work?"

Tree-ear swallowed hard. "Sir, on my way here, I was set upon by robbers. They — they destroyed my master's work —"

The assistant stepped forward in anger. "How dare you, brazen fool! How dare you demand an audience of the emissary with nothing to show him!" He reached to grab Tree-ear's arm and yank him out the door.

The weakness in Tree-ear's knees surged through his whole body now. The assistant was right. He had been a fool. First a failure, now a fool.

But the emissary had risen to his feet and gestured at his aide who stepped back, chastened.

"I am greatly disappointed," Emissary Kim said. "I have so looked forward to seeing Potter Min's work again."

Tree-ear hung his head. "Humblest apologies to the honorable emissary," he mumbled. Slowly, he took the shard from his waist pouch. He drew in a deep breath and looked down at the shard before he spoke.

How odd it looked, with its rough frame of clay. But the inlay work was still delicate and clear, the glaze still fine and pure. Seeing it gave Tree-ear a last pulse of courage.

"It is but a fragment, Honorable Emissary. And yet, I believe that it shows all of my master's skill." And he held it out before him in cupped hands.

The emissary looked surprised but accepted the offering. He inspected it carefully. He even took off the crude wrapping of clay and peered at the edges of the shard.

Then Emissary Kim sat down at his table again. He chose one of the scrolls before him, took up his brush, and began writing.

Tree-ear stood with his head bowed to hide tears of shame. Obviously, the emissary had already moved on to other business, but it would be rude for Tree-ear to leave before he had been dismissed. He wondered if he should take back the shard, which the emissary had placed carefully on the table. Amid his despair, Tree-ear still felt grateful — grateful that the emissary had not laughed in his face for the stupidity of traveling all that way with only a single shard to show.

At his side, he heard the assistant gasp in surprise. The emissary had beckoned the man and was showing him the scroll.

"Go. See that it is done," said the emissary.

"Master —" the assistant hesitated. "How is it that a commission can be awarded without seeing the work?" The man's courteous words could not mask the disapproval in his voice.

"I understand your skepticism," the emissary answered patiently. "But I have seen this man's work, in Ch'ulp'o and again here." He bent and picked up the shard from the table.

"Do you see this? 'Radiance of jade and clarity of water' — that is what is said about the finest celadon glaze. It is said of very few pieces." He paused for a moment and held the shard up before him. "I say it of this one. And the inlay work ... remarkable." His voice faded for a moment as he gazed in obvious admiration at the shard. Then he handed the scroll to the assistant. "Now, go and do as I bid you."

The assistant bowed abruptly and left. Emissary Kim looked at Tree-ear. There was kindness in his eyes — like Crane-man's, like Ajima's.

"I have written orders for him to secure your passage back to Ch'ulp'o by sea," he said. "You will go and deliver a message to your master for me. I am assigning him a commission. Tell me, have you worked for Potter Min long?"

Tree-ear was reeling from the man's words, spoken in such a calm, ordinary voice. Through a haze of disbelief and confusion, he heard himself answer. "A year and a half, honorable sir."

"Good. Then perhaps you can tell me — for your master to do his best work, how many pieces per year might I expect from him?"

Concentrating on the answer to the emissary's question helped steady Tree-ear. "I think 10. Not fewer, but not many more ..." He looked up and spoke with quiet pride. "My master works slowly."

The emissary nodded solemnly. "As well he should." He bowed his head to Tree-ear. "If you have need of shelter here in Songdo, my assistant will see to it that you are housed and fed until the boat sails. Your coming is greatly appreciated."

Tree-ear wanted to laugh, to cry, to fling his arms around the emissary and dance wildly around the room. Instead, he bowed all the way to the ground. He could not speak but prayed that the emissary understood his silent thanks.

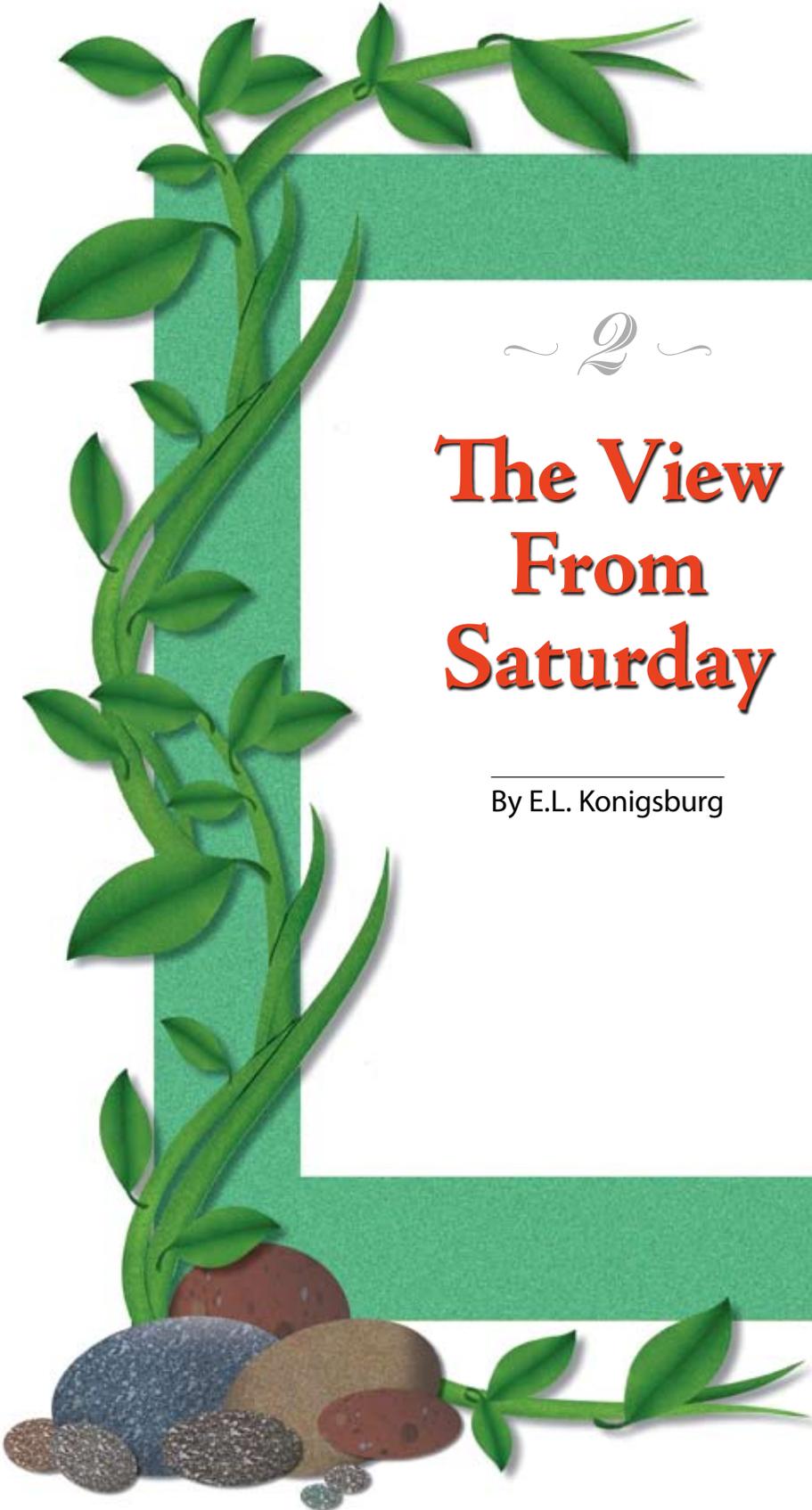
There were some things that could not be molded into words.

¹ Jiggeh in Korean is a triangle-shaped frame used to carry items on your back.



The View From Saturday

By E.L. Konigsburg



Saine Lobl Konigsburg has won the Newbery Medal twice. The first time was in 1968, for her classic *From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler*, and again in 1997 for *The View From Saturday*. The same year she won for *From the Mixed-Up Files*, she also received a Newbery Honor for *Jennifer, Hecate, Macbeth, William McKinley, and Me, Elizabeth*.

E.L. Konigsburg did not start out planning to be a writer. Growing up she “used to read in the bathroom a lot. It was the only room in our house that had a lock on the door.” Plus, when the stories got emotional, she could run the water in the tub to muffle her sobbing.

She went to college to study chemistry and also worked as a bookkeeper in a meat plant to pay her tuition. When she blew up the laboratory sink — twice — she decided she did not have the temperament to be a chemist, but she did not yet know she wanted to write. While her husband was getting his Ph.D., she took a job teaching chemistry at a small private school for girls. While teaching, she drifted further away from chemistry. “Not only did I always ask my students to light my Bunsen burner, having become match-shy,” she says, “but I became more interested in what was going on inside them than what was going on inside the test tubes.”

After her children were born, she began writing every morning. When they came home for lunch she would read to them what she had written. The kind of stories she wrote started with basic questions all children have: “Who am I? What makes me the same as everyone else? What makes me different?” These questions are asked by children no matter what their background or what is going on in their lives.

The View From Saturday features four very different children who are all chosen to represent their school in an academic quiz competition

by their teacher, the wheelchair-bound Mrs. Olinski. The children become secret friends, meeting every Saturday and calling themselves “The Souls.”

One day the four ask each other if they had one day in their life they could live over, what would that day be? Noah chooses the day he was best man for his grandfather’s wedding. Nadia picks the day when she saved turtles in the Sargasso Sea after a heavy storm. Ethan chooses the day the club came together. Julian picks the day he was told he had “chops” by a stage magician. “Chops” is the ability to do something special. Without chops, Julian explains, “you cannot be a magician, with it alone, you cannot be an artist.”

When the school puts on the musical *Annie*, Nadia’s dog, Ginger, is cast in the role of Sandy, Annie’s faithful pet. Ginger’s understudy — Arnold — belongs to a friend of the class bully, Ham Knapp, named Froelich. Julian suspects the two will try to keep Ginger from performing. He vows to stop them. And he’ll need all his chops to do it.



The View From Saturday

Ginger learned to bark Arf! on cue and quickly won the hearts of the entire cast as well as Mrs. Reynolds. Nadia was beaming.

Nadia had kindly passed along training information to Froelich and to Stage-Annie, and Arnold’s performance improved to within a shade of Ginger’s. It would have been better if Arnold had been eliminated altogether. Second best can be worse than not-in-the-running. Who knew what was happening inside Froelich’s head as he trained Arnold. Who knew what

was happening inside Froelich's head when he attended rehearsals — he had to attend them all — and had nothing to do except to wait backstage and watch admiration and affection to be heaped on Ginger. That amounted to a lot of work for little glory. During the actual performances he and Arnold were to stay backstage and out of sight — unless something happened to Ginger. Did having Arnold as an understudy make Froelich feel like an underdog?

I was not without worry.

The main performance was to be on Saturday evening before the winter recess. That was when friends and family would attend. This event was exciting for Papa and me not only because Alice's mother was about to make her dramatic debut but also because Sillington House was, too. Mr. and Mrs. Diamondstein were flying up from Florida to celebrate Christmas with the Potters and would be out first paying guests. They planned to arrive in time to see Ginger play Annie's Sandy.

Papa had only one of the guest bedrooms ready, but he was quite proud of it, and so was I. He hung the bed linen out on a clothesline he strung across the backyard so that everything would smell of the sweet air that blew off the lake. He purchased a beautiful cut glass carafe and matching drinking glass and put them on the nightstand by the bed. He purchased a poinsettia and put it on the dresser. In the closet were the heavy hangers of polished wood — not those permanently attached things that you find in cheap motels nor the weak wire ones you get from the dry cleaners — that Papa had bought in England. We had them all facing the same way so that their shadows on the wall looked like a computer rendering of an architectural cross section. The sink and tub were scrubbed until

their whiteness could snow-blind. The faucets shone bright enough to use as mirrors.

The Diamondsteins arrived on the Friday afternoon before the official start of the school holiday. That was the afternoon that I and all the other members of the elementary and middle schools of Epiphany were to attend a special matinee performance of *Annie*. For the cast it would be something more than a full dress rehearsal because of a full live audience.

Everyone at Epiphany Middle School was to be transported to the high school by bus. That meant walkers and car-poolers we all going by bus so that our usual seating arrangement was not in order. I had a window seat.

Jared Lord had the window seat two rows in front of me. Ham Knapp took the seat next to him. Ever since the first few weeks of school, when I could not avoid Knapp and his friends, I did my best to ignore them. But I was never unaware of them. Since I had become a Soul and since Froelich had started attending rehearsals, I had become less concerned about him, but Ham was another matter. I was never, never unaware of him or any of his friends. Whenever Knapp was anywhere nearby, all my senses were on alert.

Even though it was late December, the sun, pouring in through the windows of the bus as we waited in the car park, had heated it up like a greenhouse. We were dressed in woolens, so we opened the windows before sitting down for the ride to the high school. I mention all this because as soon as the bus started out of the car park, the wind coming through the open windows of the bus caused a peculiar warp on the sound.

The first word I heard was tranquilizer. It flowed out of one window and back in through mine as clearly as if Ham Knapp were sitting on the seat next to me.

I rested my head against the window post and began to listen intently. The woof of wind produced by cars approaching in the opposite direction caused some blanks in the conversation, but I heard enough.

... tranquilizer and laxative ...

How did you ...

... sent biscuits ... doggie treats ... for the star dog.

... laxative and tranquilizers and those four little legs will buckle, and those little bowels won't hold. ... There followed some laughter and some mumbling.

Nadia had told The Souls about Ginger's bad reaction to tranquilizers during her trip to Florida last August. She could very well have told this to everyone, including Froelich. Froelich could have told Knapp, or Knapp could have heard it himself, for Nadia enjoyed talking about Ginger.

Tranquilizers and laxatives. ... Pass out like a mop. Instant coma.

What's the point? She'll pass out backstage.

... point is that star dog Ginger is out and buddy dog Arnold is in.

It was clear Ham meant to harm Ginger.

No problem. ... Mother keeps a supply ...

Why would his mother keep a supply of animal tranquilizers at home?

... easy ... gave them to Nadia ... gift from my mother ...

Of course! Knapp's mother was a veterinarian, the owner and operator of Vet in a Van. On several occasions I had seen the van bring Ham to school. The van was painted with the Vet in a Van logo and beneath it was written: Pat Knapp, DVM. I had assumed that Dr. Pat Knapp was a man and that his mother had borrowed the car. It had not occurred to me that his mother was the vet in the van.

It took no great leap of intelligence to realize that Hamilton Knapp had laced Ginger's dog treats with tranquilizers and laxatives so that she would do one, possibly two, embarrassing things on stage. He gave Nadia the drugged treats and told her that they were a gift from Dr. Knapp, who was Ginger's veterinarian. I could easily picture Hamilton Knapp telling Nadia that Dr. Knapp wanted Ginger to have these special treats for her performance. Nadia was so crazy about Ginger that she would believe that anyone who met her wanted to give her gifts.

As soon as the bus stopped, I made my way forward and slipped a Year-of-the-Souls penny into Noah's hand. In the crush at the bus door, I had time to whisper, "Backstage emergency. Cover for me." For reasons we had not spoken of, yet each of us understood, none of us was ready to reveal our association. I watched Noah make his way toward Ethan and pass a Soul penny to him. He had understood. I knew he would.

Just inside the auditorium, Noah bent down to tie his shoe, and Ethan tripped over him. They caused enough confusion for me to slip back outside and run around toward the back of the building and enter the auditorium through the stage door.

I was backstage.

I stayed in the shadow of the wings for a minute until I could get my bearings. The cast was jabbering, tugging at their clothes, too excited about themselves to pay attention to anyone else.

The first time Ginger appears onstage, she is running in front of the dog catcher. She is supposed to be a stray, and her fur must look matted and dirty. Nadia accomplished this by wetting portions of Ginger's fur and tamping them down. From the audience, the wet spots looked dark and dirty. For Ginger's second appearance, she wears a rope leash, and for her final appearance, a scene in which Ginger and

Annie have taken up residence at the mansion of the wealthy Daddy Warbucks, Ginger-as-Sandy appears clean and brushed and wears a rhinestone collar and a red ribbon around her neck. Between acts Nadia has time to dry Ginger's fur and brush her until her coat glistens.

Backstage between the wings stood the prop table where Nadia kept the big red bow and rhinestone collar, the hair dryer, the rope, and the treats that Stage-Annie uses to entice Ginger. I saw the table and worked my way invisibly through the backstage crowd, a technique I had learned from Gopal when I helped him with his act on board the cruise ship.

The treats were already laid out on the props table. I saw the rope. I also saw a fancy collar, but it was wider than Ginger's, and the red bow was different. I examined the treats. They, too, were different. They were shaped like strips of bacon. Ginger's usual treats were shaped like small bones. I was sure that these were drugged. I edged my way over to the table to pick up the dog biscuits and throw them away. I would destroy these treats, and then, if time and opportunity allowed, I would find Nadia's supply and substitute good ones for the drugged ones.

If time and opportunity did not allow, then Ginger would have to go into her act without a bribe. I would count on Ginger's genius.

Before I had a chance to scoop up the bacon-shaped treats from the table, I saw Froelich and Arnold coming out of the boys' dressing room. Arnold was wet down and not wearing his collar or dog tags. Mrs. Reynolds was waiting outside the boys' dressing room. She smiled and said something to Froelich and then called, "Places, everyone."

As the backstage crowd started breaking up, I saw Nadia. She was holding Ginger's leash and carrying the shopping bag where she kept her props. Ginger was still wearing her regular collar and dog tags.

Had something already happened to Ginger?

It was only minutes to curtain. I changed directions and slipped back into the shadow of the wings. I waited until Nadia came within a few feet of where I stood. I came forward, slipped a Year-of-the-Souls penny into her hand, and immediately returned to the shadows. Nadia gave no indication that she had the penny, but she was at my side in less than a minute.

"Is Ginger all right?" I asked.

"She is fine," she said, shortening her leash and laying the shopping bag down on the floor. She reached down to pet Ginger. "Ginger is having a day off. It was Mrs. Reynolds's idea. Mike Froelich has been so good about coming to rehearsals, and Arnold has been so well trained that Mrs. Reynolds has decided to let him play Sandy at this performance."

"Oh," I said, "when did you find out?"

"Just this morning. Do not worry. Arnold is only a substitute. Ginger will appear at all of the evening performances."

"So the treats on the props table are Arnold's, not Ginger's?"

"In a manner of speaking. Our vet sent them over for Ginger, but since Arnold is performing today, I gave him some. We both use the same vet."

The treats awaiting Arnold were drugged. Neither Michael nor Nadia knew it. And Hamilton Knapp did not know that Arnold, not Ginger, was about to consume them.

I could save Arnold from the poisoned treats, let him go on, and let Knapp think that his dirty trick had worked. One for the price

of two. Or I could let Arnold eat the drugged treats, embarrass Froelich, and let Ginger go on. Two for the price of one.

There they were, waiting on the prop table. There they were, waiting for my decision.

“Why are you here, Julian?” Nadia said.

“To wish you ‘Break a leg,’” I said. “‘Break a leg’ is what you say to theater people instead of good luck.”

“And what do you say to theater dogs?” she asked.

“You double it. You say, ‘Break two legs.’”

Nadia laughed. “Really?” she asked.

“Really,” I replied.

Nadia laid her shopping bag down at my feet and tugged at Ginger’s leash. “Come along, Ginger,” she said, “let us go wish some people to break some legs.”

I watched them walk away.

I made my decision.

I waited in the dark of the wing until the orchestra was well into playing the overture, for then I knew that the house lights would be lowered, and I could make my way to my seat unnoticed. Noah and Ethan had propped their jackets and backpacks on the aisle seat so that the shadow cast in the darkened auditorium could easily be mistaken for a person. I slipped into the seat, nodded to both Noah and Ethan and waited for Sandy’s first appearance on stage.

The first time Sandy appeared, running across the stage being chased by the dog catcher, the audience broke into spontaneous applause. They were already in love. The second time, the policeman asked, “Is that your dog, little girl?” and Sandy walked across the stage and sat at Stage-Annie’s feet, and once again the audience broke into applause. This time, however, when the applause was about to die down, Knapp and

Lord exchanged a triumphant look and began barking, “Arf! Arf! Arf!” and clapping in rhythm. Soon all the other kids picked up on that, and the play could not continue.

Senior monitors started fanning down the aisles to locate the source of the trouble, but before the monitor was even with their row, Knapp’s hands were folded in his lap; his lips, sealed.

When the play was finished and after all the players had taken a bow, Arnold-as-Sandy walked in front of all the actors and sat down, center stage. The red bow had slipped from the back of his neck to the side. He sat downstage, center, for only a second before glancing over his shoulder, getting up, and walking a few steps upstage to line up with the other players. Stage-Annie and Daddy Warbucks took a step to the right and to the left respectively to make room for him. Arnold looked out over the audience, sitting in a circle of light, and the audience went wild.

They stood, began clapping in rhythm to their chant, SAN-dy, SAN-dy, SAN-dy. Knapp and Lord picked up the beat and started an undertone of Arf! Arf! Arf!, and soon the audience began a two-part chorus with half the auditorium chanting SAN-dy, and the other half responding with ARF, ARF in a manner more suited to an athletic contest than musical theater. The curtain was dropped, the house lights came on, and the chanting softened, faded, and died. Knapp and Lord exchanged a satisfied look.

Mrs. Reynolds walked onstage and stood in front of the curtain. She held a microphone in her hand and hissed into it, “Sit-t-t down!”

THUMP-THUMP-THUMP-THUMP-THUMP-MP-MP-MP — the sound of hundreds of bottoms hitting hundreds of seats followed.

Mrs. Reynolds waited until an embarrassed silence fell over the auditorium. "Part of the theater experience is learning to be a good audience. You have not been a good audience. You have been a very bad one. I am sorry that you have not learned at home how to act in public. I am ashamed for you because I know you are not ashamed for yourselves. I would like you to leave. Now. You can start correcting your behavior by leaving this auditorium in a quiet and orderly fashion."

Suddenly senior monitors appeared at the end of every third row, and we quietly and slowly made our way toward the exit. The auditorium was almost empty by the time we reached the exit. Mrs. Olinski was sitting in her chair between the doors. She called my name. "Julian. Julian Singh," she called, "I would like to see you a minute."

Had she seen me slip backstage? Or did she think that I had started that ruckus in the auditorium? My school days are over, I thought. I will be expelled, I thought. How will I break the news to Papa?

Mrs. Olinski said, "I understand that you have guests at Sillington House."

"Yes, ma'am, we do. Mr. and Mrs. Diamondstein were due to arrive from Florida this afternoon."

"Mrs. Diamondstein is an old friend of mine. She asked me to stop by and meet her new husband. How would you like to ride home with me?" she asked.

I was so relieved that I could not speak. I answered by nodding my head like one of those nodding animals that Americans put on the rear ledge of their automobiles.

Ethan, who was just behind me, said, "May I come, too? Mrs. Diamondstein is my grandma Draper."

"Yes, so she is. I had almost forgotten. Of course, you may come."

"Let me go backstage and get Nadia," Ethan suggested. "Mr. Diamondstein is her grandfather."

Mrs. Olinski laughed. "It seems all of our sixth grade is one happy family. Go ahead," she said. "Go backstage and tell Nadia to meet us at my van."

A voice that was midway out the door called, "Can I come, too?"

"You, Noah? What reason do you have?" Mrs. Olinski asked.

"Me?" Noah asked. "You want to know what reason I have for coming along?"

Mrs. Olinski smiled patiently.

"Well, Mrs. Olinski, my reason is the best of all. Fact: I was best man at their wedding."

Mrs. Olinski laughed. "Were you really?"

"Yes, I was. I'll tell you about it. I'll spare no detail."

Mrs. Olinski laughed. "Then, by all means, Noah, you must come along."

Noah grinned. "I have always wanted to ride in a handicapped van. All my life, I have wanted to see how a disabled person like yourself applies the brakes and steps on the gas."

Mrs. Olinski said, "I don't exactly step on the gas."

"There you go!" Noah said. "This is precisely what I would like to see. I would precisely like to see exactly how you apply the gas."

Mrs. Olinski said, "That is either the most honest or the most dishonest answer I have ever heard. I must notify the bus driver that I'll be driving you four souls home."

Why did she say that? She was smiling. Did she know that we were The Souls? Did she know? Noah caught my eye and quickly changed the subject. "You'll have to take Ginger home, too, Mrs. Olinski. If you don't mind, of course."

You don't have to have any special fittings in the van to transport animals. It's a good thing, too. Now, if Ginger were a seeing-eye dog ..."

Mrs. Olinski interrupted. "Noah," she said, "run down to the bus and tell Mrs. Korshak that I will be along in a minute. I have a message for her."

"I'd be happy to give her that message, Mrs. Olinski."

"I'm sure you would, but that message involves permissions that I, not you, have the authority to give." Noah started down the row of yellow buses, and Mrs. Olinski followed.

There had been a moment backstage when I had been tempted to allow Arnold to eat the drugged treats. That had been the same moment that I thought it would be satisfying to get even with Froelich and Knapp. But then I was able mentally to separate Froelich from Knapp and Arnold from both of them, so I slipped over to the props table, scooped up all the poisoned treats, and put them in my right pocket. At the same time I substituted Ginger's wholesome treats — treats that I had taken from Nadia's shopping bag — from my left pocket. The drugged treats were still in my pocket.

Ethan, Nadia, and Ginger had not yet come out of the auditorium. Noah and Mrs. Olinski had gone to speak to Mrs. Korshak. I stood alone. There was something I wanted to do. When Knapp had started that ruckus, I had momentarily regretted my decision to save Arnold. I was still so angry that I was about to violate one of the cardinal rules that Gopal had taught me.

I walked out onto the street so that no one on the sidewalk would notice as I made my way down the line of buses waiting — headlight to taillight — by the curb. Beyond them was the line of cars waiting for pickups. Traffic could go

only one way, and no one was allowed to make a U-turn, so even those cars that had already picked up their riders were stuck, waiting for the buses to load.

Gopal had taught me that magicians never reveal the secrets of their trade to laymen. Gopal always said that magicians who were interested in letting people know how clever they were were not really magicians. "Don't ever destroy the wonder," Gopal had said. "Let your magic show you off, not you show off your magic."

I knew that Hamilton Knapp would find out soon enough that Arnold, not Ginger, had been chosen for the afternoon's performance. He would find out soon enough that his trick had not worked. I knew that I should never reveal to Hamilton Knapp that I had saved Arnold from the fate he had meant for Ginger. I knew all of that. Yet I moved toward the Vet in a Van. Dr. Knapp was behind the wheel, waiting for her turn to pull out. I walked around the back of the van onto the sidewalk on the passenger's side. I tapped on the window and motioned for Ham to roll it down. I reached into the open window. He pulled away from me but said nothing.

"What's the matter?" his mother asked.

"Your son has something growing out of his head," I said as I pulled two bacon-shaped doggie treats from his ears. "I think these belong to you," I said as one by one I dropped the rest of the drugged biscuits on his lap. I turned and walked away.

I was glad that I had chops. Gopal would forgive me.



Catherine, Called Birdy

By Karen Cushman



Karen Cushman was 50 years old before she started writing. Growing up, she says, “I didn’t know writing was a job, something real people did with their lives, something like being a secretary or a salesman.” Despite not being a writer, Karen Cushman was always coming up with ideas for stories. Finally, her husband challenged her to write one of her ideas down. That idea became her first novel, *Catherine, Called Birdy*, which won a Newbery Honor.

The world of *Catherine, Called Birdy* is very different from the one Karen Cushman lives in — it is set in England in the year 1290. For 11 years she taught in the museum studies department of a California university. There she sharpened her skills at research, which came in handy when she became a writer. She’s not what you might think of when you think of a history buff. “I grew tired of hearing about kings, princes, generals, presidents,” she says. “I wanted to know what life was like for ordinary young people in other times. It’s the small, obscure details that bring stories to life.”

Before writing the book, Karen Cushman had never even been to England. When she visited, she says, “I stepped off the plane and said, ‘Show me Medieval England!’ It’s not there. It’s hardly there any more than it is in Ohio. The past is a foreign country. I did a lot better with research and my imagination than if I’d gone there expecting to see and smell any of the Middle Ages.”

Catherine, Called Birdy describes a year in the life of a 13-year-old daughter of a minor nobleman. She writes about daily annoyances like flea bites, her “abominable” brother Robert, and the smell of the privy in the summer. She dreams of traveling and living a life of adventure like her Uncle George, who has just returned

from the crusades. But as a girl, Catherine is expected to marry a man of her father’s choice: to be “sold like a cheese.”

Catherine gets to work chasing off suitors, giving each one a reason to not want to marry her. Unfortunately, Catherine’s father finds a man who will not be put off. Lord Murgaw — whom Catherine calls “Shaggy Beard” and also “that dog assassin whose breath smells like the mouth of Hell, who makes wind like others make music, who attacks helpless animals with knives, who is ugly and old” — is determined to have her.

Catherine refuses to marry Shaggy Beard no matter what her father wants. When he sends her betrothal gifts of a silver toothpick, a sewing kit, a gauze green headdress, and a pouch of silver, she vows never to use any of it. To spend the silver would be to consent to the marriage. But when Catherine finds an old dancing bear about to be forced into bear-baiting, she sacrifices herself to buy the bear and save it with the help of her brother Robert, who might not be so abominable after all. On the eve of the day Shaggy Beard sends for her to be married, Catherine runs away. But can she run away from her life?



Catherine, Called Birdy

7TH DAY OF SEPTEMBER

I do not know how she can be so hot and not consume herself and the bed linen and the whole manor in flames. I have not slept nor Morwenna since the baby was born. Bess from the kitchen has taken her and feeds her with the same milk and the same love she feeds her own babe. Dear God, I can do no more for either of them.

Morwenna will not let me back in my mother's chamber until I rest and eat, so I am pretending to do so while really I write this and pray.

8TH DAY OF SEPTEMBER, *Birth of the Virgin Mary*

My mother worsened and we sent for Father Huw to ease her dying. And then my father came home.

He threw Father Huw down the stairs, opened the window in the solar, cast all of us out, and stayed there with her pacing and whispering and shouting until dark. He came out then, face gray but eyes shining, to say she lives. And will live. I thank you, God, and the Virgin Mary, whose birthday this is, and my father, the most unlikely agent of a miracle that I know. I think he just battled the devil and won.

9TH DAY OF SEPTEMBER, *Feast of St. Ciaran of Clonmacnoise, an Irish abbot who used a fox to carry his papers until it ate them*

She still lives. And the baby also. My mother demanded that the cradle be moved back into her chamber, so I have made a bed on the floor near them. I must keep them safe. We will call the baby Eleanor Mary Catherine.

10TH DAY OF SEPTEMBER, *Feast of Saint Frithestan, bishop of Winchester*

Now that I am about to leave, I feel how dear this place is to me. I sat in the field next the village this morning, trying to memorize the sounds — the squeal of car wheels and the bawling of babies, the shouts of children and peddlers and cross old women, the hissing of the geese and the roosters' crow. The dogs were barking, the water wheel splashed, and the smith's hammer rang like a church bell. I took it all into my heart so I can play it like music whenever I need to.

11TH DAY OF SEPTEMBER, *Feast of Saints Protus and Hyacinth, brothers and slaves, who were burned alive*

I am painting on my chamber wall God holding baby Eleanor in his arms. What I think about God is that He is not some old white-haired man. If God can be anything He wants, why would He choose to be an old man? Thomas Baker's grandfather is an old man; he has no teeth and coughs and spits painfully. John Over-Bridge is an old man. He hobbles from his house to the woods to piss and is barely able to hobble home. I think God would not choose to be an old man. Or a woman — God's father would probably marry Him off to some pig in pants. No, I think God is like a young king, clean and shining in his armor, with long legs and soft eyes, mounted on a white horse, singing and smiling. And that is how He is on my chamber wall.

12TH DAY OF SEPTEMBER, *Feast of Saint Ailbe, an Irish bishop who was suckled by a wolf*

I am excited, saddened, and confused. I cannot talk to Aelis about this, for it is she who confuses me. We met in the meadow this morning. I waited there until the sun was high and a thousand new spots popped out on my nose before she finally arrived. Her color was bright and her breathing labored, and not just from the heat of the climb, it appears. Her father has told her she is to wed my brother Robert!

I fell upon her in tears, babbling about how we were in the same barrel of pickles and could run away together and give puppet shows at fairs and to Hell with Shaggy Beard and his silver and my promise. Aelis just laughed and put her hand over my mouth.

"Hush your chirping, Little Bird," she said. "Wedding Robert is my idea."

Then she sang on about his shining eyes and strong hands and lusty laugh. Robert! She

must have been enchanted by some witch with a mind to jests. Robert! I tried to tell her of his abominations and his utter beastliness but her cheeks grew pink and she laughed and said, "Yes, I know, Robert is a true man." God's thumbs! Robert!

So I am excited that Aelis will be my sister, saddened because I will not be here to enjoy her but will be a prisoner to some pig in the north who sends his bride a toothpick and a sewing kit. But mostly I am confused. Why would Aelis marry Robert? What about George, whom she vowed to love until she died? And who is Robert, the beast I see or the lover Aelis sees? The rascal he acts or the young man who found a home for a shabby bear to please his little sister? I think sometimes that people are like onions. On the outside smooth and whole and simple but inside ring upon ring, complex and deep.

13TH DAY OF SEPTEMBER, *Feast of Saint John Chrysostom, archbishop of Constantinople, killed by enforced travel in bad weather*

I sought Robert after dinner and asked if he weren't still grieving over his poor dead wife and their babe and how could he think to wed again so soon. He told me to keep my beak out of his business and grinned. He has lost a front tooth. Good.

Today I finished painting baby Eleanor's face on the mural in my chamber. Mayhap when she grows older, it will be her chamber and she will think on her older sister who lived and slept and painted here.

Only five days to Shaggy Beard.

14TH DAY OF SEPTEMBER, *the return of the True Cross to Jerusalem by the emperor Heraclius of Judea*

We gathered nuts today — walnuts, chestnuts, hazelnuts, looking especially for the

double nuts that protect against rheumatism and the spells of witches. As we gathered, I imagined eating them, in sauces and cakes and roasted in the fire on a stormy November night. I cannot believe I will not be here to share them.

Four days until Shaggy Beard.

15TH SEPTEMBER, *Feast of Saint Adam, bishop of Scotland, who was burned to death by his people for increasing the tax on cows*

Three days to Shaggy Beard.

My mother let me look today in her mirror of polished silver. "I must know how I look right now," I told her. "I must see myself as myself once more before I become the unwilling Lady Shaggy Beard." She unwrapped the disk from its velvet covers and held it before me. My eyes are still gray, not blue, and my hair brown, not gold. The sunspots are still there, dotting my nose and cheeks like speckles on an egg, though my mother says I look none so bad when I am not squinting or sulking.

16TH DAY OF SEPTEMBER, *Feast of Saint Edith, virgin, whose thumb remained uncorrupted after death*

I have the opinion that longing to be blue-eyed and golden-haired like the maidens in songs profits me nothing. Easier, I think, to change the songs than my face. So I have begun a new song:

*Her eyes were gray and brown her hair
As she went down to Bartlemas Fair.
With her rumpled clothes
And spotted nose
No blue-eyed beauty could compare.*

I will finish it some other day.

17TH DAY OF SEPTEMBER, *Feast of Saint Francis of Assisi receiving the five wounds of Christ*

Morwenna and I have packed my gowns and robes this day. I have wandered the manor since, saying goodbye to the barn cats and the chickens, to Perkin's goats and Sym's pigs, to Meg in the dairy and Gerd at the mill and Rhys in the stables. When I reached the dovecote, the doves put me in mind of myself, raised only to breed and die. So I let them out and shooed them away. I have no doubt they will come back — doves are none too bright — but for now they are free.

And I let my chamber birds go as well, taking each to the window and wishing it Godspeed as I opened the cage door. Goodbye to Dittany and Clubmoss, Wormwood, Saffron, Sage, and all the others. I who must be caged could leave them no longer in cages. So I set them free — all but the popinjay, who could not survive on his own. I gave him to Perkin, as well as the other half of my pouch of silver so he can buy his way free from his obligations to my father and find a way to become a scholar. I have no doubt he will do it. Perkin is still the cleverest person I know.

One day to Shaggy Beard.

21ST DAY OF SEPTEMBER, *Feast of Saint Matthew, apostle and evangelist, martyred in Ethiopia. Or Persia*

The day after I last wrote, riders from Shaggy Beard appeared at our hall. While they were closed away with my father, I ran to the high meadow to say goodbye to Perkin. When I reached the road, however, instead of crossing over, I turned north. I was fairly crazed with fear, like a beast pursued by dogs, thinking only to get away. Then I saw a picture in my mind of my Aunt Ethelfritha winking and telling me to run to her next time. By cock and pie, I thought,

I will do it! Uncle George I am not sure of, but Aunt Ethelfritha will help me! I tucked a sprig of mugwort in my shoe so I should not tire on the journey and set off for York.

I was two days on that road and mugwort or no mugwort arrived looking like a dying duck in a thunderstorm. I had taken not a penny nor a crust and I was afraid to be seen, so I dared not ask for food. My stomach worm gnawed all the way to York. I slept outside in haystacks and, thanks be, had no rain until the last afternoon. By the time I arrived yestereve just after supper I was so hungry and weary and footsore I could not walk an ace farther.

My uncle George was from home for the night but there was my dear Aunt Ethelfritha, a little more broad across the narrow but merry and warm. She put me in mind of Morwenna, for she made me wash and comb my hair before she would let me eat. If she had said, "Have some cheese. It will keep your bowels open," I would have sworn it was Morwenna. Finally, she fed me with herring pie left from supper and a parsnip pudding while I told her my troubles.

We huddled in her great bed until very late making plans for my deliverance. "Ireland," she said first. "Across the water to Ireland where sure there are relatives of your lady mother who will hide and protect you."

Ireland seemed no easy escape to me so I proposed London, where I might make my way by ... what? Embroidering? Hemming sheets? Brewing remedies for ale head and swollen legs?

No Ireland. No London. We fell asleep still unsettled. Before dawn, I was awakened by a screech and a face full of chin whiskers right next to mine. Ethelfritha.

"Of course," the face bellowed. "Cathay! George must know merchants who trade there. We could disguise you as a slave girl being sent as a gift to the great khan and carry you muffled in veils on the back of a camel. The trip is three years over snowy mountains and blazing deserts so for certain no one would find you there.

"Or dancing girls," she cried. "We are slim and supple dancing girls from some Saracen court where we bewitch the sultan with our beauty. Or I will ask my sons the king, the pope, and Saint Peter to help us ..." and she was off somewhere on her own, no longer Ethelfritha but some personage of her own making.

God's thumbs! My aunt Ethelfritha is as mad as the moon! She had forgotten herself again just when I needed her. I could see she would be no help. I was alone in my troubles and I alone had to conceive a plan before George came home so I could convince him it would be worth the trouble to help me.

Sitting beneath a pear tree later in the drizzling rain, I thought about my choices. I have no desire for three years of snowy mountains or some Saracen court. I cannot be a monk shut off from the world. I cannot be a crusader riding over the bloody bodies of strangers I am supposed to hate, or a wandering minstrel unconnected to any place or anybody. I cannot be like Odd William, involved only with the dead people he writes about while the living swirl in joy and pain around him. I cannot be like Aunt Ethelfritha, who, in being anyone she chooses, forgets who she really is.

Suddenly I saw the old Jewish woman saying, "Remember, Little Bird, in the world to come, you will not be asked 'Why were you not George?' or 'Why were you not Perkin?' but 'Why were you not Catherine?'" And it came into my head that I cannot run away. I am who I am wherever I am.

Like the bear and my popinjay, I cannot survive by myself. But I also cannot survive if I am not myself. And who am I? I am no minstrel and no wart charmer but me, Birdy, Catherine of Stonebridge, daughter of Lord Rollo and the lady Aislinn, sister to Robert and Thomas and Edward and little Eleanor, friend of Perkin, goat boy and scholar.

I am like the Jews in our hall, driven from England, from one life to another, and yet for them exile was no exile. Wherever they go, they take their lives, their families, their people, and their God with them, like a light that never goes out. I imagine them somewhere in Flanders eating their Jewish food and talking their horses' talk and loving one another and their God. At home even in exile.

Just so, my family and Perkin and Meg and Gerd and Aelis and the barn carts and even my father are part of me, and I part of them, so even in my new life I will not be far from home.

I realize that Shaggy Beard has won my body, but no matter whose wife I am, I will still be me. Mayhap I can do what I must and still survive and, please God, even thrive. I have girded my loins like a warrior from the Bible and am going forth to do battle with the enemy. He shall not find it a comfortable prize he has won, this gray-eyed, sun-browed beauty. Amen.

After dinner my uncle George came home, surprised but pleased to see me. His mouth smiled and his eyes almost did as I told him of the mad plans of Ethelfritha and how I decided I cannot escape my life but can only use my determination and courage to make it the best I can. He will take me home tomorrow. We will ride, which suits my feet just fine.

22ND DAY OF SEPTEMBER, *Feast of Saint Maurice and his 6,666 companions, Roman soldiers of the Theban Legion martyred for refusing to sacrifice to pagan gods*

We leave in one hour. In George's garden I saw a toad, may it bring me luck. And as Morwenna says, luck is better than early rising.

23RD DAY OF SEPTEMBER, *Feast of Saint Thecla of Iconium, virgin and follower of Saint Paul. Condemned to be burnt, a storm put out the fire. Sent to be eaten by beasts, they would not. She escaped and lived in a cave for 72 years*

I am home again. Such ado! I was kissed and slapped and lectured until my ears turned inside out. I told my tale and then sat to listen to theirs.

It seems God is indeed watching over me. Or else toads really are lucky. How I know is this:

The riders from the north did not say that Shaggy Beard comes for his bride, but that he is dead, killed in a brawl over a tavern maid. His son Stephen is now Baron Selkirk, Lord of Lithgow, Smithburn, Random, and Fleece, and wishes to honor the marriage contract in his father's place. He sent me an enameled brooch of a little bird with a pearl in its beak. I am wearing it now.

My lady mother and the beast my father think it no better and no worse that I marry Stephen instead of Shaggy Beard, but for me it is like moving from the darkness into the light, like coming in from a cold gray mist and seeing the fire make a warm and golden glow in the center of the hall, like the yolk of a boiled egg or the deeper gold in the belly of a rose.

As I sit here in my chamber watching the sun set, I realize that the fear that drove me this half year is gone. Shaggy Beard is gone. I think I do not truly even remember what he looked or acted or sounded like. Mayhap Shaggy Beard was never so bad as I imagine him. Or mayhap he was.

In any event, I am, if not free, at least less painfully caged. I am filled with a trembling that feels like feathers fluttering in my gut but I think is hope. All I know of Stephen is that he is young and clean, loves learning, and is not Shaggy Beard. For these alone I am prepared to love him.

I have been making a list of names for our children. I think to call the first one George. Or Perkin. Or Edward. Or Ethelfritha. Or Magpie. Or mayhap Stephen. The world is full of possibilities.

I leave in October. Only one month until Stephen!

~ 4 ~

Code Talker:

A NOVEL ABOUT
THE NAVAJO MARINES OF
WORLD WAR II

by Joseph Bruchac



Joseph Bruchac grew up in the foothills of the Adirondack Mountains in New York. He was raised by his grandparents, who owned a general store. His grandfather was an Abenaki Indian who showed him how to fish and walk through the forest without disturbing the animals. His first experience as a writer was in second grade, when he wrote poems for his teacher. “One day she read one to the class,” he says. “Some of the bigger boys got jealous. They beat me up after school. That was my first experience with hostile literary critics.”

When he grew up, he collected Native-American stories from tribal elders and began writing them down. If there is a central theme to the many books he’s written, he says it is “that we have to respect each other and the earth, and that we never know anyone until we know what they have in their heart.”

In *Code Talker: A Novel About the Navajo Marines of World War II*, Joseph Bruchac tells the story of Navajo Ned Begay. As a little boy Ned is sent from his home on the Navajo reservation to a boarding school. At school the children are only allowed to speak English. If they are caught speaking Navajo they are punished. Ned is a good student, but he never forgets his family’s traditions or how to speak his native language.

When Ned is 16, a former student returns to the school as a Marine. World War II has started. Ned is eager to join the fight, but he is only 15. He agrees to wait for one year, and then his parents take him to the recruiting office and say he is old enough to join the Marines and become a “leatherneck.” Ned is not the only Navajo to join. In basic training the Indians do exceptionally well. Although Ned is small, he has already earned the nickname “Ant” because he is so strong. At the end of basic training, Ned

and several other Navajo are chosen for a special class — a class in Navajo.

The objective is to develop a code for use on the battlefield that is based on the Navajo language. It is almost impossible to speak Navajo if you are not a native speaker, so no one can break the code. After some initial resistance, Ned’s commanding officers come to rely on their code talkers.

Ned is sent to the Pacific. He makes friends with the men in his company, who call him “Chief.” Joseph Bruchac has tried to portray war through Native-American eyes. “War, as the Navajos and many of our other nations understand, injures the spirit,” he says. “Those who have been to war, victorious or not, have been damaged by it and must find ways to regain their spiritual and emotional balance.”

In 1945, Ned and his platoon are sent to fight on Iwo Jima. In battle Ned draws strength and courage from his memories of his family back home and his warrior ancestors.



Code Talker:

A Novel About the Navajo Marines of World War II

Chapter 25 In Sight of Suribachi

“Can’t be as rough as it was on Tarawa.”¹

“No way as hard as it was taking Peleliu.”¹

“After the Canal,¹ this’ll be a piece of cake.”

Those are some of the things my Marine buddies said on our way to Iwo Jima. They’d been through the fighting that made those other Pacific Islands feel like little bits of hell on earth. They’d struggled out of sinking landing craft,

stormed the beaches while machine gun fire tore up the sand around their feet, heard the terrible sound of air being ripped apart around them by pieces of whirling metal, seen buddies killed right next to them. There was no way this little piece of volcanic garbage could be as bad as what they'd been through.

They were right. Iwo Jima wasn't like those other landings that seemed like bad dreams. It was the worst nightmare of all.

It wasn't the fault of our commanders. Iwo Jima wasn't just "softened up" for a few days before D-day.² It was pulverized. For five months, heavy bombs dropped on that little island almost every minute. Hour after hour, for days on end, high explosives poured from the sky like metal rain. It seemed impossible that anything could survive.

What Command didn't know was how deep the enemy had dug into the island. Those thousands of tons of bombs didn't do much more than disturb the sleep of the Japanese soldiers in reinforced caves and tunnels a hundred feet below the black sand.

They were well-supplied, too. They had distilleries set to make drinking water and stocks for food enough to last for years. In fact, grandchildren, when we finally took that island and began exploring the deserted Japanese positions, we Marines found something that made us feel especially angry. We were looking through a cave when the beam of my flashlight caught the glint of metal.

"I cannot believe this," I said.

"Wull I'll be danged," Georgia Boy said.

There, stacked from floor to ceiling, were thousands and thousands of boxes of canned goods. There was everything from beans and meat to fruit cocktail — just like those canned goods we Navajos had gotten together on our food drive to help the poor earthquake victims.

All of those cases were clearly marked on the side in English: U.S.A. FOOD RELIEF

It was indeed the very same food donated by Americans to Japan before the war. The Japanese military government had stolen it from their own hungry people.

The Fifth Fleet that Admiral Spruance sent in against Iwo Jima was the largest one that had ever sailed the Pacific. Twelve aircraft carriers and 44 destroyers, 44 transport ships, 30 minesweepers, and many other vessels. Four hundred sixty-four ships in all. Our fleet was so big that there were four command ships, each with its own team of Navajo code talkers. There were also non-Navajo teams sending and receiving messages in Morse code on the command ships and among the landing forces. However, all the messages sent by Morse code were false, designed to fool any Japanese monitoring our transmissions. Everything important was run through our Navajo net.

The Fifth Marine Amphibious Corps was also the largest landing force in the history of the Marines. Three reinforced divisions, 70,000 men in all. The Fourth and the Fifth would lead the attack.

On February 19, 1945, at about 0100, the major part of our fleet dropped anchor 4,000 yards off the shore of Iwo Jima. Third Division waited 50 miles to the south-east. It would only be called for if it was desperately needed. That need came far sooner than expected.

Breakfast was to be served at about 0500. Before then, though, I made my way very quietly to the upper deck. I knew other code talkers were doing the same on the command ships and other transports.

I stood with nothing over my head but the sky. I faced the east, took a pinch of pollen from my pouch, and placed it on my tongue. I put a little dab of pollen on top of my head and spoke my words to the Holy People.

“Let me have clear thoughts, clear speech, and a good path to walk this day,” I prayed as I watched the rising sun.

Breakfast, as always, was a big one. There was a tradition back then of serving every Marine a T-bone steak, eggs, and biscuits with lots of gravy, and as much coffee as he could drink before getting into his landing craft. The idea was that a Marine needed the energy from the food to go into battle.

“Enjoy your last meal, Leatherneck,”³ said the cook who served me.

I smiled and nodded to him. It was part of a ritual our cooks followed. Calling it our last meal was a way of wishing us good luck.

Most Marines ate as much as they could of that big breakfast. But not me. Instead, I took two big slices of bread, stuck my steak in between them, wrapped it up, and stashed it in my combat pack. I had plenty of reasons for doing that. I wasn't feeling hungry yet. Plus, I had seen what happened to a lot of those big breakfasts eaten by keyed-up Marines who had to get into boats being rocked back and forth by the waves. You learned not to stand in front of a jarhead⁴ whose face was turning green. His breakfast was about to become fish food.

Another reason for not eating before heading into combat was something no one wanted to talk about. It was better to take a bullet in your guts on an empty stomach. The medics knew that and did what I did — stashed breakfast in their packs or just didn't eat.

My main reason, though, for packing away the steak was that I figured I'd need it later. I'd learned what it was like to be pinned down in a foxhole for hours on end with nothing to do but chew on your last C-rations. If that happened on Iwo, I'd be happy to have a steak sandwich in my pack.

As I stood on deck, waiting, ready to climb into the LST,⁵ I got my first look at Iwo Jima appearing in the faint light before dawn. The looming shape of Suribachi made the hair stand up on the back of my neck. That mountain rose like the shadow of a monster against the dark sky.

At 0630, the guns of our support ships began to roar. Fire shot out of the cannons of the *Idaho*, the *Nevada*, the *New York*, and the *Tennessee*. Our bombardment tore up the beaches and the slopes of Suribachi, but there was no answering fire from the shore. Waves of airplanes swept in, Marine Corsair F4Us. They blanketed just about every square foot with rockets and fire. Smoke filled the air, and the hot breeze from the island brought the scent of the napalm to us. But there was no response. It was like the whole island was dead.

Some of us dared to hope that the Japanese defenses had been wiped out by our guns and during the months of bombing. But I remember the words General Howling Mad Smith spoke at the meeting. He'd been the only commander with serious doubts about the plan.

“This will be the bloodiest fight in Marine Corps history,” he said. “We'll catch seven kinds of hell on the beaches and that will be just the beginning. The fighting will be fierce and the casualties will be awful, but my Marines will take the damned island.”

My new Signal Corps group was with the first wave. Most of the non-Navajo men were guys I'd just met. Georgia Boy had been assigned to another company in the second wave. Smitty,

though, was right beside me. Smitty and I had reached the point where we felt as if we were each other's good luck charm. As long as we stuck together in battle, nothing too bad could happen to either of us.

Our LSTs moved up to the line of departure at 0730 and our amphibious alligators rolled down the ramp into the water. Unlike the first alligators we used on Bougainville, they were more heavily armored all around. Also, each alligator had three machine guns and a 75-millimeter howitzer. After unloading us on the beach, our alligators were supposed to crawl inland another 50 yards to form a line of fire protecting the men who came after us.

0830. The Central Control vessel dipped her pennant. The 68 alligators of our second Armored Amphibian Battalion crossed the lines of departure. Five minutes behind us was the second wave, then the third, the fourth, the fifth, and the sixth. As so often happened, a nervous Marine behind me started checking his watch and calling out the time.

"Five minutes," he said. Then, "Six minutes. ... Seven."

I could feel it getting warmer as we got closer to the island. Mount Suribachi kept getting larger above us as we continued in.

"Ten minutes. ... Eleven."

I thought at first that the growing warmth was only nervousness or my imagination as I remembered General Smith's words about hell. But heat actually was coming from the island itself. Iwo Jima had been made by volcanoes. Its name, which means Sulphur Island, is an appropriate one. The closer you got, the hotter it was. When we arrived on the island we'd see cracks in the rock where steam rose up. If you pushed your hand down too far into the loose sand your skin would be burned.

"Fifteen minutes. ... Sixteen."

At 0906 our alligator ground on the black sand. The ramp, which had the words WELCOME TO PARADISE printed on it in big block letters, dropped.

"Go," our lieutenant, who was in the boat with us, yelled. "Don't bunch up on the beach."

We poured out, expecting our welcome to be mortars and machine guns. Instead, as our feet sank ankle-deep in the black sand, the only fire we heard was from our own guns out to sea. The four battleships had adjusted their range. The slopes 500 ahead of us were being blanketed with bursting shells that threw up geysers of fiery sand.

Our second wave landed and then our third. There was still no sign of any enemy.

0910.

0915.

0930.

All 9,000 Marines of our first wave were on the beach, ready to move up the steep terraces toward Mount Suribachi and the two airfields on the plateau in the middle of the hilly island.

It had all been too easy. I adjusted the strap of my radio over my shoulder and shook my head as I peered up at the mountain. It seemed to be staring down at me the way a cougar watches a deer before it attacks.

"Hey," Smitty said to me, "this is like a walk in the park, Chief."

Then the Japanese sprung their trap.

CHAPTER 26

THE BLACK BEACH

Our Navajo net on board the *Bunker Hill* was set up in the radio room just above the flag bridge at the very top of the ship. It made for a good place to see what happened on the island. Johnny Manuelito told me about it later. As the last boats of our first wave reached the shore, Johnny watched from the flag bridge. He'd just set up

to send and receive and was waiting for the first messages. The whole island was blanketed with smoke and dust, but he saw through his binoculars that we'd reached the beaches untouched.

Just then, something came streaking down out of the sky heading right at him. It was a shell from the Japanese guns that had suddenly opened fire. It hit the top deck a few feet below where he was standing. But instead of bursting on impact, it bounced off, went spinning down, ricocheted off the next deck, and blew up far below.

Johnny stared down in silence for a moment. Things like that, he thought, made you feel glad you performed your ceremony. Then he jumped to his radio that had crackled into life as the shores of Iwo Jima burst into flame.

A hundred yards in from the beach, what had seemed like a walk in the park had turned into a swim in a sea of fire. The most intense storm of howitzer and mortar shells, machine gun, and small-arms fire any of us had ever experienced was raining down on us. Blue-green vapor lines of Japanese tracer bullets stitched the air above our heads. Once again I heard the sound that is one of the most awful things anyone can hear: the dull thud, between the sound of a slap and a punch, of a bullet hitting the body of a human being. I heard it again and again, followed by cries of pain from those who were not killed when burning pieces of lead struck them.

There was no line of protection between us and the enemy ambush. Our alligators tried to make a quick crawl up the steep slope of the terrace so they could set up a fire line. The black sand was too loose and too deep. Spraying sand, a few of them reached the top of the terrace closest to the beach. But where we were, right below Suribachi, it was just plain impossible. Our amphibious boats turned around, roared

back down onto the beach, and churned their way out into the water 50 yards or so. From there, they could at least fire over our heads.

That 15-foot rise was just about as hard for a man to climb as for a tracked vehicle. Sand shifted out from under our feet as Smitty and I tried to scramble up the steep slope. My arms were sucked in up to my elbows as I tried to find my balance. Black sand flowed into my face and down my neck.

"Like trying to swim ... up ... a waterfall," Smitty grunted as he reached back and grabbed my arm to pull me after him.

I didn't say anything. My mouth was too full of sand.

Our work was worth it, though. When we finally reached the top a big reward was waiting for us. Not only did we have a great view, but we were fully exposed to the enemy fire that started the exact instant the two of us got there. The Japanese had waited until we Americans had swarmed up the first slope and were like sitting ducks on the wide plain before the next terrace. Smitty and I fell to our bellies and scrambled like sand lizards to the only cover we could find, a little dip in the ground.

I got out my radio while Smitty dug our foxhole deeper. More Marines were coming in behind us. They needed to know what was happening. I waved at Lieutenant Lewis, who was deepening his own foxhole 50 feet to the right of us. Before long, he had runners bringing me the messages I needed to send back to the ship. Those messages were a measure of how desperate things had become for us by 1100.

Receiving steady fire from grid 29B.

Deliver to Green Beach 1: 5,000 rounds
.30 caliber belted.

Air strikes with 100 pound bombs at 132N.
Estimated battalion casualties, 60 killed.
Two radiomen down.

On board ship, the messages from our Navajo net coordinated gunfire, insured resupply, and helped our commanders estimate what had to be done. Taking the island was going to require every available man. The ships carrying the Third Division were called in.

Many of the things that happened during our first three days on Iwo Jima are hard for me to remember clearly, grandchildren. That may be just as well. When I think of that time, scattered pictures appear in my mind. Marines running through fire to hurl grenades into pillboxes. Wounded men limping forward into the fight with nothing more than pistols in their hands. A burning Sherman tank lifted right up into the air and flipped upside down by the explosion of a 500-pound bomb that had been buried as a mine. The still, lifeless faces of men who had shared food with me, laughed and joked only hours before, men whose voices I would never hear again.

Then there were the smells. The odor of sulfur was everywhere. It mixed with the burning gasoline from the flamethrowers and napalm bombs, the sharp tang of gunpowder, the overheated metal of machine-gun barrels, so hot that they were melting. Worst of all was the stench of burning skin, so thick at times that many lost their appetites. By the night of that first long day, though, all were so hungry that they wolfed down whatever they had with them. I remember brushing big green flies and black grit off my steak sandwich before eating it in the foxhole Smitty and I constantly had to keep digging out as the hot shifting sand flowed back over our feet.

I also hear clear voices when I remember that time. I hear those voices and my own heart grows calm again. They are Navajo voices speaking strongly in our sacred language. Speaking over the concussions of the exploding

shells so close that the pressure in the air made it hard to breathe. Speaking above the deadly whirr of shrapnel, the snap of Japanese rifles, and the ping of bullets bouncing off our radio equipment. Speaking calmly. Speaking even when our enemies tried to confuse us by getting on our frequency to scream loudly in our ears and bang pots and pans.

Speaking. Speaking through that day and the next and the next. Even when our voices grew hoarse, we did not stop. Our Navajo nets kept everything connected like a spider's strands spanning distant branches. The winds of battle never broke our web. As the battle for Iwo Jima raged all around us, our voices held it together.

¹ Tarawa, Peleliu, and Guadalcanal are names of battles in the Pacific theater during World War II.

² D-day is a term often used by military to denote the day on which a combat attack or operation begins.

³ Leatherneck is a slang term for a U.S. Marine.

⁴ Jarhead is another term for a U.S. Marine.

⁵ An LST is a flat-bottomed vessel developed during World War II to land troops and cargo on open beaches.

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Letters From the Corrugated Castle

A NOVEL OF GOLD RUSH
CALIFORNIA, 1850-1852

By Joan W. Blos



Joan Blos didn't start out intending to be a writer. There were many years when she did other things: She was a teacher and a mother. Everything in her life has a place in her books. "When I was a little girl bothering my father with too many questions," she recalls, "he would chide me with the saying: 'Curiosity killed the cat.' Years later I discovered that saying has a second half: 'Satisfaction brought it back.' Most of my stories begin in curiosity and bring satisfaction when completed."

Joan Blos is best known for *A Gathering of Days*, which won both the Newbery Medal and the American Book Award. *Letters From the Corrugated Castle* is set in California in the 1850s. This period is known as the Gold Rush. When gold was discovered in California thousands of people from all around the world rushed to the American West Coast hoping to strike it rich. The book is told through letters the characters write to one another.

Eldora has found something much more valuable in California than gold — her mother. When Eldora was three years old her mother fell sick during a cholera epidemic. She was not able to sail to San Francisco to meet her husband. So she sent little Eldora on alone in the care of the sea captain. Unfortunately, Eldora's father had died. With no one to take care of her, Captain Shipman brought Eldora to the home of his own aunt and uncle who had lost a child.

Ever since then, Eldora has been raised by Aunt and Uncle. They are her family now — and they recently have moved to San Francisco. When they arrive there, they receive a letter from Eldora's real mother, who has never forgotten her. Eldora decides to leave her home with Aunt and Uncle — their "corrugated castle" (named so because it is made of iron) — and

live with her mother for the first time. Although Aunt and Uncle are very sad to see her go, they know this is something she has to do.

Life at her mother's inn in San Pedro is not what Eldora imagined. She misses the friends she met back in San Francisco, Miguel and Lucia, a Mexican brother and sister. Her mother is often away taking care of business, leaving Eldora in the care of the staff like Fernanda, the cook at the inn. Although her mother loves Eldora, her responsibilities as a businesswoman don't leave her much time to mother a 13-year-old girl.

Then one morning Lucia arrives on the doorstep with her mother. Miguel has been killed, and Lucia's mother cannot afford to take care of her. She is returning to Mexico, but wants Lucia to live in a place where she is well cared for and can go to school. Can she stay at the inn? Eldora welcomes Lucia and her beloved doll, No Name. Eldora knows what it feels like to be separated from your mother, and tries to comfort Lucia when the little girl feels abandoned by telling her a story from her heart that will give her the courage to understand her mother. In this excerpt, Eldora writes to her Cousin Sallie about the story she told.



Letters From the Corrugated Castle :

A Novel of Gold Rush California, 1850-1852

THE 27TH LETTER

San Pedro, Salinas Valley, California
Friday, December 5, 1851

Dear Cousin Sallie,

Some thing so strange and sweet and sad happened today that I must tell you at once (even if all I am able to do is set it down on paper and know that many weeks will pass before you receive it).

I was sitting outside with Lucia, who held, as she often does, her well-loved, ragged doll. I noticed that she was looking angry — which is unusual for Lucia — but could not discover the cause. All at once, and without saying anything, she threw the doll into the road.

“I have too much trouble with you,” she told the doll. “That is why I am throwing you away and leaving you here. Soon I will get a new doll.”

“But Lucia,” I said, collecting the unfortunate doll from where it lay in the dust, “she is your doll since a long, long time ago. I think you will be sorry if you do not have her anymore.”

Lucia looked at me defiantly. “No,” she said. “No. I will not be sorry, and my mother, who has left me here, she is not sorry either.”

“Oh, Lucia!” I said, putting my arms around her. “Oh, Lucia! I think that is not so.”

I almost said, “Look at me, Lucia! My mother sent me away. But now I am here with her!”

But instead of saying that, I told Lucia a story. I put my name in it, but it was her story, too. While I was telling it, Lucia reached out and took back the doll — which I had been keeping on my lap — and cradled it.

When I came to the end of my story, she looked up at me and said, “I think this doll does not like to be a no-name doll anymore. Now I will call her Eldora.”

“And I will like that,” I said, “very, very much.”

A few minutes later Fernanda called, and we went inside. I was holding Lucia’s left hand, and she — with the right — held my new namesake.

I hope you do not find my story too foolish. I have recalled it as well as I can and set it down for you. I enclose it here.

Eldora

ELDORA’S STORY

Once upon a time there was a little girl, and her name was Eldora. Her mother was very, very sick. She was so sick she could not sleep, and it hurt her ears if her little girl cried or made noise. She was so sick she could not take care of her little girl.

One day the little girl asked her mother to play with her. Her mother said, “I am too sick to play with you. You must play by yourself, Eldora.”

The next day the little girl asked her mother for something to eat. The mother said, “I am too sick to cook your food. Others will cook for you and give you food.”

On the third day the little girl asked her mother to tell her a story. The mother said, “I am too sick to tell stories. You will have to make up your own story or tell yourself a story you have heard before.”

On the fourth day a sea captain came to visit. “My ship is ready to sail,” he said to the mother. “Will you come with me?”

The mother said, “I am too sick to sail with you on your ship. But if you take my daughter on your ship, you will see that she can play by herself, she can eat food that others cook, and she can tell herself a story. These things, and more, my daughter can do. And when the voyage comes to an end, she will stay where you live and be happy.”

"I will do as you ask," said the captain.

"And one more thing," the mother said.

"Please tell my daughter three times every day that even though I am far away, I will love her forever and ever. And tell her also that I promise that one day, some day, she will see me again."

THE 28TH LETTER

San Pedro, Salinas Valley, California

Saturday, December 13, 1851

Dear Cousin Sallie,

When Lucia thrust her doll into the road and I told the story I made up, I did not think that anyone was near or that it would have mattered. After all, it was only a simple tale, made up to save a well-loved doll from a dusty death. A day or so later, my mother told me that she had, in fact, been standing near the window that opens onto my schoolroom. She had seen Lucia throw her doll into the road and overheard our conversation. I at once wondered if I was about to be reprimanded for enrolling myself in the rescue of Lucia's doll. But it was my story she wanted to talk about. She had been thinking about it, and there was something she wanted to ask me.

"I wonder," she began, "that we have not spoken of it before. But I suppose we each had our reasons.

"Not many days ago," she went on, "you asked me to consider what might have happened had Captain Shipman's aunt and uncle not taken you into their home.

"What do you suppose would have happened, you challenged me, had they not done this? And now I must ask, why do you suppose I gave you to Captain Shipman and asked that he take you to your father?"

"Because you were sick," I said, "and when I cried, you could not sleep."

"Oh, my dear Eldora!" my mother cried out. "Did you really think that was the reason?"

I nodded.

"And that was all?"

I nodded again.

"And did you not think then, or thereafter, how it would have been if I had died, and you — a child not yet three years old — had been left alone in Panama City with no one to look after you? No one, even, who knew you and could take you to your father who was, I believed, awaiting us in Buena Vista. That, if you remember, was all I asked of Captain Shipman."

I could not reply because I had never thought of these things. I just believed that my mother was a beautiful lady, a princess, a queen! And when she fell ill, I had been a trouble to her. So she had tossed me aside as Lucia had done with her doll.

Then a new thought struck me.

"Aunt never told me the rest of the story," I said, "about my father that was to meet the ship, but he was dead, and then Captain Shipman took me to her and Uncle. Did she know?" I asked.

"I think she knew," my mother said softly. "But perhaps she believed that telling you these things would only make you sad. Or perhaps she told you something of the sort, something that you — being such a little girl — could not understand, and so you did not remember."

“No,” I insisted. “She did not tell me and I did not know.”

“But now you do,” my mother said. “Sometimes, no matter how hard we try, we simply cannot imagine what a little child might think. And we make mistakes.”

I turned to my mother and put my arms around her, burying my face as I did so in the soft silk of her dress. “All the time — all this time — I thought you sent me away because I cried and ...”

“It was a pestilent city,” my mother said, stroking my hair as she spoke, “and I feared, and others feared, that I would not live. It was to save you, Eldora, so that you would not become ill or be left alone in a country of strangers. Only for that. Only and solely for that. Not for all the sleep in the world would I have sent you away.”

When I looked up, my mother’s eyes were filled with tears. And so were mine.

With my mother holding me, I wept for minutes on end. When I was able to stop, and could sniff the last of the tears away, my mother held out a handkerchief.

“Trick,” she said, and each of us managed a smile remembering the first trip from San Francisco to San Pedro and how, on that occasion, she had cheered me with her trick when I cried.

I do not know if anyone was watching us. But now, with my mother leading me as carefully as if I were a little child, we walked — without speaking — all the way to the very end of the garden and all the way back.

“How little we know,” my mother said thoughtfully, “and to think that I, a grown woman, was as ignorant of your thoughts and fears as you were of my reasons.”

More silence. Then in a voice that seemed to change the subject but in truth did not, she said, “The children cannot stay here, as you know. But someplace is needed. And I will think on it.”

“So will I,” I said, not knowing quite what I meant. But I think my mother understood, and that was all that mattered.

My heart is full to bursting.

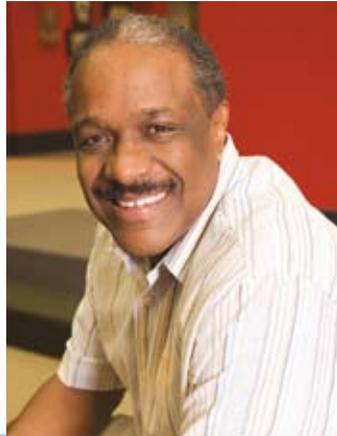
I will write soon again and am

*Yours, as ever,
Eldora*

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Bud, Not Buddy

By Christopher Paul Curtis





Christopher Paul Curtis based two of the characters in *Bud, Not Buddy* on his own grandfathers, Earl “Lefty” Lewis, a Negro baseball league pitcher, and Herman E. Curtis Sr., the leader of a jazz band in the 1930s.

Like Bud, Curtis comes from Flint, Michigan, where he worked on the assembly line in one of its famous car factories for 13 years. He was awarded the Newbery Honor for his book, *The Watsons Go To Birmingham — 1963*. *Bud, Not Buddy* is the only book to have won both the Newbery Medal and the Coretta Scott King award for African-American writers.

Bud, Not Buddy takes place in 1936. Ten-year-old orphan Bud Caldwell sets out on his own across the country to find the man he thinks is his father. His only clue is an old flyer for a jazz band — Herman E. Calloway and the Dusky Devastators of the Depression (the name of Curtis’s real grandfather’s band).

Bud lives during the Great Depression at an orphanage until he is sent to live with a foster family for the summer. When the family unfairly locks Bud up, he “goes on the lam” and runs away. He decides to head for Grand Rapids, where he believes his father, Herman E. Calloway, lives. Bud has never met his father and has never been to Grand Rapids. But he sets out on foot with all his possessions in a broken suitcase tied with rope.

The road is not safe for a young boy on his own, especially a young black boy who isn’t welcome by some because of his race. But Bud is not alone traveling the roads. Widespread unemployment and poverty have uprooted many families. Bud eats in soup kitchens and stays briefly in a shantytown.

Everything that happens can teach Bud something, and he wants to learn it all because he has to live by his wits and take care of himself. He puts his most important life lessons on a special list: “Bud Caldwell’s Rules and Things for Having a Funner Life and Making a Better Liar Out of Yourself.”

Armed only with his old flyer, his suitcase, and his Rules and Things, Bud begins his 120-mile walk from Flint to Grand Rapids. That distance is a lot farther in reality than it looked in the library atlas where Bud planned his journey. No one is waiting for him at the end of his trip. He doesn’t even know if he’ll find the man he’s looking for in Grand Rapids. But all the same — Bud’s going west!

In the episode excerpted here, “Lefty” Lewis drives by Bud out on the road in the middle of the night. Lefty has no intention of letting a boy Bud’s age walk the highway alone. But Bud isn’t sure if he should trust this man. For all he knows, he might be ... a vampire?



Bud, Not Buddy

Chapter 10

Flint ended all of a sudden and I was in the country. It was like one of those days that it’s raining on one side of the street and not on the other. Here you have Flint and a sidewalk, you take one baby step, and here you have country and a dirt path. On the sidewalk side a sign said, YOU ARE NOW LEAVING FLINT, HURRY BACK, and on the dirt path side, YOU ARE NOW ENTERING FLINT — ENJOY YOUR STAY.

I jumped in and out of Flint around seven times before that got boring and I decided I'd better head for Grand Rapids. It was already very, very dark and unless things were different in the country it wasn't going to be getting light anytime soon.

One hundred and twenty miles. It didn't take too much time before I figured out that 24 hours' worth of walking was a lot longer than I thought it would be. I must've only been walking for a couple of minutes when everything changed.

First off there were the sounds. Flint could be pretty noisy, what with cars honking horns and trucks with no mufflers on them shifting gears and people yelling out at each other so you couldn't tell if they were happy or about to bust out fighting.

Out here in the country the sounds were loud too, but what I was hearing was the sound of bugs and toady-frogs and mice and rats playing a dangerous, scary kind of hide-and-go-seek where they rustle around and try to keep away from each other or try to find each other. Instead of being tagged and called "it" like the way human beans¹ play the game, out here the ones that got got, got ate up. Every step I took toward Grand Rapids I could hear the sounds of mice bones and bug skeletons being busted up by the teeth of bigger things.

Every once in a while a couple of cats would give out the kind of howls and yowls that would make the hair on your neck jump up if you were a human bean and your heart turn into a little cup of shaky yellow custard if you were a mouse.

I walked and walked and walked. Some of the time a car would come by and I'd have to duck into the bushes and wait till it had passed, so I don't think I was doing any five miles an hour.

I felt like I'd been walking all night but I'd only gone through three little towns.

I was getting so tired that I started to forget to duck in the bushes when a car would roar by. Some of the time they'd see me and step on their brakes for a second, then speed off. Most times they never noticed me.

Another car bounced over the top of a hill. The lights blinded me for a second and then I ducked into the bushes again.

The guy in the car stepped on the brakes to slow down and I could see him twist his neck around.

He stuck the car in reverse and pulled to a stop about 30 giant steps away from where I was hiding. His door opened and he stepped out and started walking slow toward my bushes. He brushed his hand over his head and put on a black hat like the kind the police or some army men wear. But all the cops I'd ever seen were white so I knew this guy must be a soldier.

He stopped and put his fingers to his lips and whistled. The whistle was so loud that it made me duck down and put my hands over my ears, it felt like he'd blown it right inside my head. All the bugs and toady-frogs shut right up, they quit chasing and biting each other cause this had to be the loudest whistle they'd ever heard too.

Rocks were crunching as the man in the black hat walked a couple of steps up the road, then stopped again. For the second time he blasted my ears with that whistle. The noise-making critters in that patch of road got quiet.

He said, "Say hey!"

He waited, then yelled, "Say hey! I know my eyes aren't what they used to be, but I know they aren't so bad that they'd lie to me about seeing a young brown-skinned boy walking along the road just outside of Owosso, Michigan, at 2:30 in the morning."

I couldn't tell if he was talking to me or to himself. I peeked up to see if I could get a better

look at this man. He came closer to me, then stopped about 10 giant steps away.

"And I'ma tell you, I've seen some things out of place before and a young brown-skinned boy walking along the road just outside of Owosso, Michigan, at 2:30 in the morning is definitely not where he ought to be. In fact, what is definite is that neither one of us should be out here at this time of night."

He squatted down and said, "Are you still there?"

I raised my head a little higher to get a better look at him and his big car. He'd left the door open and I could hear the engine of the car grumbling, it was saying, *wugga wugga, wugga, wugga, wugga.*

"Son," he said, "this is no time to play. I don't know and I don't care why you're out here, but let me tell you I know you're a long way from home. Are you from Flint?"

How could he tell I was from Flint just from seeing my face for a second in his headlights? I wonder how grown folks know so doggone much just by looking at you.

Something was telling me to answer him but I still wanted to get a better look.

He stood up. "You know what? I bet if I can't get you to come out with talk I got something else that might make you show your face.

"From the quick look I got at you, you seemed a little on the puny side. I'll bet anything you're hungry. Just so happens that I've got a spare baloney and mustard sandwich and an apple in the car. You interested?"

Shucks. How did he know I was so hungry?

Then he said, "Might even have some extra red pop."²

Before my brain could stop it my stomach made my mouth yell out, "But I don't like mustard, sir."

The man could tell which bushes I was hiding in but he didn't bum-rush them or try to get me, he just laughed and said, "Well, I didn't check, but I don't suppose the mustard's been glued on, I'll bet we can scrape it off. What do you say?"

I was carefuller talking to him this time so he couldn't track where I was. I turned my head and talked sideways out of my mouth like one of those ventriloquists. "Just leave them at the side of the road and I'll get them. And please open the bottle of pop, sir, I don't have a bottle key on me."

He squatted back down again and said, "Oh, no, can't do that. The deal is I feed you, you show me your face."

From the way the man talked he seemed like he was OK and before my brain could stop it my stomach told the rest of me to slide my suitcase deeper into the weeds and walk out.

The man stayed squatted down and said, "I knew I saw something. A deal's a deal so I'ma go get your food, all right?"

"Yes, sir."

He stood up, turned his back to me, then ducked inside the car. A second later he came back with a brown paper bag and a big bottle of red pop.

"Here it is."

He stood there acting like I was going to have to come over to him and get it.

"Could you put them down and I'll eat them and you can keep driving, sir?"

He laughed again. "Thanks for your concern, but I've got a little time to spare."

With him standing there in the dark dangling the bottle of red pop out of his right hand and the red taillights of the car behind him shining through the bottle it looked like the reddest red in the world. I walked right up to the man like I was hypnotized. I forgot all my manners and reached right out.

He raised the bottle over his head. "Hold on now."

"Could I have some of the pop, sir?"

He smiled. "That's not why I said hold on, I said it because we have some talking to do first."

My eyes left the bottle and looked at the man.

His hat wasn't a cop hat or a soldier hat, it was the kind of cap men wore who drive fancy cars for rich folks. And it wasn't black. It was red.

He said, "I've got a problem and I need you to help me figure it out."

Uh-oh. What he'd just said is another one of Bud Caldwell's Rules and Things for Having a Funner Life and Making a Better Liar Out of Yourself. This was Number 87.

RULES AND THINGS NUMBER 87

When a Adult Tells You They Need Your Help With a Problem Get Ready to Be Tricked — Most Times This Means They Just Want You to Go Fetch Something for Them.

The man said, "My problem is I'm not quite as brave as you are. I'm feeling very, very uncomfortable standing on the side of the road just outside of Owosso, Michigan, at 2:30 in the morning, and the sooner you can put my mind at ease about what you're doing out here the sooner we both can go about our business, OK?"

I nodded.

He waited a second, then nodded too.

I nodded back.

He said, "Well?"

I was too doggone tired and hungry to think up a good lie. "Nothing, sir."

He looked disappointed. "What's your name, son?"

"Bud, not Buddy, sir."

"Now there's an unusual name. Did you run away from home, Bud-not-Buddy?"

I could tell this guy was poking fun at me but I answered anyway. "Yes, sir."

"OK, that's a start."

He handed me the bottle of red pop. He must've had it sitting in ice in the car, it was cold and sweet and delicious.

After a couple of seconds he pulled the bottle away from my mouth.

"Hold on, hold on, don't belt it all down on the first pull. There's plenty here."

I slowed way down.

"OK, Bud, you've run away from home, where is that?"

I don't know if it was because of the red pop juicing up my brain or because I'm such a good liar, but one of those things got me thinking again real quick.

The first thing I knew was that no matter what I told him this man wasn't going to let me stay out here by myself, but the nervous way he kept looking around was making things seem so scary that not staying out here was OK.

The second thing I knew was that I couldn't tell this man about the Home or the Amoses. I wasn't about to let him take me back to either one of them.

The man said, "Where's home, Bud?"

Then another jolt of red pop must've pumped through my heart because my brain came up with a perfect lie.

"I ran away from Grand Rapids, sir."

See how perfect the lie was? Maybe this guy would feel sorry for me and put me on a bus to Grand Rapids and I wouldn't have to do any more doggone walking. He must have some money, anyone driving a car like this would have to be rich or at least know somebody who was rich.

The man scratched under the back of his hat and said, "Grand Rapids!" He said that like it was the most unbelievable thing in the world, like you'd need to put six exclamation points after it.

Something about the way he said it made me nervous but I answered him. "Yes, sir." That's the bad thing about lying, once you say one you've usually got to stick with it.

"Well I'll be ...," the man said. "That's where I'm from, I left there not an hour and a half ago."

He snatched the bottle out of my hand, grabbed my arm, walked me over to the passenger's side of the car, and started to open the door.

I was going to be getting a ride but I said, "Sir, I left my suitcase over in the bushes, can we please get it?"

"See, my eyes aren't near as bad as I thought they were, I knew you had a box or something. Bud-not-Buddy, you don't know how lucky you are I came through here, some of these Owosso folks used to have a sign hanging along here that said, "To Our Negro Friends Who Are Passing Through, Kindly Don't Let the Sun Set on Your Rear End in Owosso!"

He must not have trusted me 'cause he kept holt of my arm. We went over to the bushes and I grabbed my suitcase. Then he walked back to the car.

When he opened the passenger's side door I could see that there was a big box sitting on the front seat. The man never let go of my arm and wrestled the box over into the backseat.

If he would've let go of my arm for just one second I would've run like the devil was chasing me. On the side of the box some big red letters said as clear as anything, URGENT: CONTAINS HUMAN BLOOD!!!

Oh, man, here we go again!

My heart started jumping around in my stomach. The only kind of people who would carry human blood around in a car were vampires! They must drink it if they were taking a long trip and couldn't find any people to get blood from. This guy figured he'd rather have my fresh blood than blood out of a bottle!

I barely heard him say, "Get in. I'm going back to Grand Rapids tomorrow, I'll send a telegram to your folks and then take you back."

Then he made his first mistake, he let go of my arm. I slid into the car and he closed the door behind me. Quick as anything I locked the door and crawled over to the driver's side of the car and pulled that door closed and locked it just as the vampire reached for the handle to get in. I dug around in my pocket and pulled my knife out and put it under my leg.

I put my hands on the steering wheel and I looked at the gearshift to try to figure which way was "Go." I stretched my legs out as far as they'd reach and could just get to the gas pedal.

I pulled the gear lever down and the car took off with the vampire running as hard as he could to catch me.

Wow! If I kept things like this up I would knock Baby Face Nelson³ off the FBI's 10 most wanted list!

CHAPTER 11

The car only went 30 giant steps before it commenced to bucking and finally cut right off. The vampire guy finally caught up with me. He was looking very surprised, he just tapped on the window with his knuckle. He said, "Roll the window down for a minute, Bud."

Sometimes it's terrible to have been brought up proper. I couldn't help myself, I rolled the window down just enough so that our words

could get in and out but his hands or claws couldn't.

He said, "OK, what's this?"

I said, "Don't you think I can read? How come you're carrying real human blood around in your car?" I showed him my jackknife. "I'ma warn you, I know how to kill vampires. This knife is genuine solid 24-karat silver."

He put both of his hands over his face and shook his head back and forth a couple of times. He said, "Sweet baby Jesus, why me?"

Then he said, "Bud, if you were from Flint I might think you believe that, but you're a Grand Rapids boy, you've got to be smarter than that. If I was a vampire why have I got that sandwich and bottle of red pop?"

I thought for a second, then the answer jumped out. "Bait!"

He put his hands back over his face. This time when he pulled them away he was laughing. He said, "Bud, if I was a vampire I wouldn't have to catch little boys, I'd just stick my fangs into one of those bottles and have my supper. Besides, where've you ever heard of a vampire that knew how to drive a car?"

That made sense, in all the moving picture shows I'd seen and all the books I'd read about vampires I never could think of seeing one that could drive a car. But I wasn't going to take any chances.

"Could I please see your teeth, sir?"

"What?"

"Your teeth, sir."

The man mumbled something, shook his head again, then leaned close to the window glass and opened his mouth.

Even though he didn't have fangs his teeth still looked kinda scary. They looked like they could bite a pretty good grapefruit-sized chunk out of you.

Then he said, "Bud, I've got to get this blood to Hurley Hospital in Flint, they need it right away for someone's operation. I can look at you and tell you're far too smart to believe in any nonsense like vampires, son. Be a good boy and open the door."

I pulled the lock up for him and scooted over to the passenger's side of the car. I unlocked my door just in case he had any tricks up his sleeve.

He got in the car and said, "You'll never know how grateful I am to you, Bud. I'll take that horrible image of you putting the car in gear to drive away while I stood by the side of the road in Owosso, Michigan, at 2:30 in the morning to my grave with me. Thank God you don't know how to drive."

"No, sir, but if you'da showed me some fangs I'da learned real quick."

Just in case, I watched the way he put the car in gear so's the next time something like this happened I'd know how to make a clean getaway. Me and the man headed back toward Flint, driving over the same road it took me so long to walk. Going like this I wasn't never going to get away from this doggone city.

We hadn't been driving for a minute before he started asking a whole slew of questions. Questions that I had to be very careful about giving the right answers to.

He said, "Don't you feel bad about worrying your mother like this, Bud-not-Buddy?"

"My mother is dead, sir." Most times if you tell a adult that they'll leave you alone, but not this man.

"What? I'm sorry to hear that, Bud. So you stay with your daddy?"

"Yes, sir."

"Right in Grand Rapids?"

"Yes, sir."

"What's his name, does he work for the railroad?"

"No, sir." The seed started sticking its head out further and further. "His name is Herman E. Calloway and he plays the biggest doggone fiddle you'll ever see."

The man shouted, "What?"

I said, "Really, sir, I swear 'fore God it's the biggest fiddle in the world."

He said, "I know your father, everybody in Grand Rapids does."

I didn't say anything.

He said, "Well, I'll be. You know, at first glimpse I wouldn't say you look that much like Herman, but now that I look at you I suppose you do. Of course he's quite a bit bigger, if you know what I mean."

This was the best news I'd had all day, my face nearly split in half from my giant smile. "Yes, sir, folks say I'm the spitting image of my old man."

He really started shooting the questions at me so to stop him I said, "Sir, could I please have the sandwich and the rest of the red pop before I answer any more questions?"

He slapped his forehead and said, "Oh, I'm sorry, Bud, I was so surprised about who you are and so happy that you didn't drive off that I forgot all about our deal."

He handed me the sandwich and the pop and the apple. I was so hungry that I forgot all about scraping the mustard off the baloney sandwich and even like that it was the best sandwich I'd ever had in my life.

"Bud," he said, "my name's Mr. Lewis. Now if you were about 15, 20 years older you could call me Lefty. But you're not, so you can't. Mr. Lewis will do just fine."

I shoved the part of the sandwich that I was chewing into the side of my mouth so I could say, "Yes, sir, Mr. Lewis, sir."

He said, "I'm not ashamed to admit it, you gave me a scare here tonight that I'll never forget. I just know I'll be having nightmares about meeting you for the rest of my life. I'll wake up in a cold sweat many a night with the picture of you and my car pulling away with that blood on the seat.

"I can see it all now, I'll be sound asleep, deep in the middle of a Dorothy Dandridge⁴ dream, when all of a sudden I'll be standing on the side of the road in Owosso, Michigan, at 2:30 in the morning and I'll be seeing my car and that blood pulling away with nothing of you showing but that little peanut-head of yours peeking up over the dash."

He looked at me out of the side of his eye.

"Anyone ever tell you you've got a little peanut-head?"

I glugged down the pop I'd been swishing around in my mouth and said, "No, sir."

"Well," he said, "this may be the first time but unless you undergo some major surgery I'll bet it won't be the last."

"Yes, sir."

He waited a second, then sounded kind of disappointed when he said, "Don't take it so seriously, Bud, I am teasing, you know."

I started in on the apple. "Yes, sir."

"Ever been in the army, Bud?"

"No, sir."

"Well, I've got to tell you, I haven't heard so many 'sirs' since I was back at Fort Gordon in Georgia training for the Big War."

I almost said, "Yes, sir," but I looked at him and guessed he was still teasing.

I took another drink of the red pop and saw that when I was raising the bottle I'd accidentally let some of the sandwich slip out

of my mouth down into the pop. There were a couple of chunks of chewed-up bread, a blob of baloney and some of the mustard swimming around in the bottle. The mustard was real pretty, it looked like some kind of magical fog, every time I moved the bottle the mustardy smoke went into a different kind of shape.

Lefty Lewis said, "How about sharing that pop, Bud?"

Uh-oh. He took one look and handed it back.

He said, "Nothing personal, Bud, I've raised three kids and have two grandkids, I've learned the hard way about drinking after young folks. But I do believe you need to get in and see a doctor soon, son, it looks to me like you've got a serious backwash problem, that's the most food I've ever seen floating around in a bottle of pop. In fact, that doesn't look like red pop anymore, it looks more like red stew."

I real quick chugged the rest of the pop down and ate the apple real slow because I figured as soon as I was done with it the questions would start up again.

Lefty Lewis said, "Aren't you sleepy?"

This was perfect! I could pretend I was falling asleep and then come up with some answers that would get me to Grand Rapids for sure. I yawned real big. "A little bit, sir."

"All right, here, give me that core, I think the only thing that's left is a seed or two anyway."

I handed him the apple core and he put it and the wax paper from the sandwich in the paper bag.

"You just stretch out there and have some sleep. In about an hour you'll be in a nice comfortable bed. We can have our talk in the morning."

He reached in the backseat and said, "Here," and handed me a jacket. "You can use this for a blanket."

The jacket smelled real good, like spice and soap.

Lefty Lewis said, "Oh, Bud-not-Buddy, one more thing before you doze off. Could you reach over into that box and hand me one of those bottles of blood? I haven't had a bite to eat all day."

I kept my eyes closed and smiled. I knew I was going to be safe, because I'd never heard of a vampire that could drive a car and I'd never seen one that had such a good sense of humor. Besides, I kept my jackknife open under my leg and he looked like he'd believed me when I told him it was made out of real silver, even though it probably wasn't.

As soon as I had the jacket over me the smell of the spice and soap and the sound of the crickets and toady-frogs outside made my eyes get real heavy.

¹ The word is "beings." Bud is writing it the way he hears it.

² Red pop is a soft drink.

³ Baby Face Nelson was a notorious bank robber in the '30s.

⁴ Ms. Dandridge was an African-American actress.



Shabanu, Daughter of the Wind

By Suzanne Fisher Staples



Suzanne Fisher Staples grew up in a small town in Pennsylvania, but worked as a news reporter in Hong Kong, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. Later she returned to Pakistan to study the lives of the people there. A lot of what she learned went into *Shabanu*, the story of a girl from the Cholistan desert between northwest India and southeast Pakistan. She says, “My books are made up of real stories about real people.”

Shabanu was a Newbery Honor book. It was also awarded the American Library Association’s Best Book for Young Adults. *The New York Times* named it a Notable Book of the Year.

Shabanu lives with her parents and her older sister, Phulan. Their life in the desert with their camels is a hard but loving one. Phulan is due to be married in less than a year. She is no longer a child and now must never go outside without being veiled. The family all works together to raise money for Phulan’s dowry for her wedding. They hope to get a good price for their camels when they take them to the market.

Shabanu loves caring for the family’s herd of camels. She will no longer be able to have this job once she becomes a woman, so she cherishes the time she has left with the camels, especially her favorite camel Gulaband, whom she’s taught to dance. The desert is full of dangers. January rain drives scorpions out of their holes and sends them scurrying out to bite anything that moves. Cobras and the even deadlier snakes, kraits, lurk in the sand. Most of all the family is constantly on the move, searching for water. When it rains, water fills up the *tobas* — freshwater ponds — in the desert. When the toba dries up, Shabanu and her family must be on the move. Despite all the hardships, the thought of leaving Cholistan fills Shabanu’s heart with pain. Still, she will

have to leave once she is married. She does not have a choice.

One morning, when Shabanu is tending the herd alone, vultures fill the sky over her head. Something is always dying in the desert. Today Shabanu fears it will be one of her beloved camels, bitten by a poisonous snake. Even worse, the dying camel is a female about to have a baby. She cannot let the family lose both mother and child. Shabanu calls for help, but she is completely alone.

There are few things in her life that Shabanu can choose. She has no power over the desert or the many more powerful people in her world, but in this moment she can protect what she loves most — her camels. With the vultures circling, Shabanu must save the baby camel from certain death.



Shabanu, Daughter of the Wind

Birth

I see the vultures just before noon — a lazy, circling reminder that life is fragile. Normally snakes and scorpions spend the cold weather underground. But rain in January fills their holes and tunnels, forcing them out, angry and confused, and they bite anything that moves. So the vultures make long, lazy loops in the sky, prowling for anything that falls.

It’s my turn to tend the herd and I am busy. After a rain the camels don’t need to stay near the toba — water is everywhere, and they wander where they want. When the weather is dry, the toba is like a magnet; eventually they all come back to drink.

I notice the circle of birds tighten and then hear a dreadful bellow. I am running, my heart on fire, before the first yellow bird dives. The birds gather behind a spiky clump of pogh,¹ dropping from the sky now like heavy, feathered sacks. The yellow-gray wings flap furiously. The bellowing continues, though weaker now, and I know the camel is still alive. My legs carry me with what seems like superhuman speed; still it's forever before I reach the dying female.

I wade among the swarming mass of feathers, shrieking animal warning sounds, waving my arms, and beating at the great bald-necked vultures that have gathered at the camel's head, waiting to feast greedily the second life leaves her.

More birds, each nearly my height and weight, hover around her hindquarters, waiting to disembowel her. Or so I think until I move around for a full view.

The birds are after her unborn baby! Only its head and front feet extend from the mother. The sack has burst, and the baby's eyes are shut tight against the brilliant sun. It isn't breathing yet, but the mother has lost the strength to push, and I know if I can't pull it out, it will die.

I am exhausted from running and chasing away the vultures. I can't think what to do. I take another look at the mother's face. She has stopped struggling, and her breath comes in short gasps. Her legs are rigid in front of her. Bending closer, I see the swollen flesh around two puncture marks on her nose. I think she's been bitten by a krait, a snake even deadlier than the cobra.

Camels give birth lying down, but the second the baby is born the mother stands, and the baby tumbles out onto the ground. The shock breaks the cord and knocks air into the baby's lungs. This mother will be paralyzed within minutes, and unless I can birth the baby, it will die.

I grab the baby's head and pull, but there is no give. I pull gently at first, then in desperation I begin a steady pressure with all my strength, one hand behind the baby's head, the other gripping his forelegs. I stop to rest, panting, tears streaming down my face, and notice an inch of neck, wet with mucus, has been born.

With a grunt, I grab both forelegs now and give a mighty yank. Nothing happens. A memory takes shape in my mind of fetching boiling water to a room with moans and soft cries slipping like ghosts through the shuttered windows, of Mama lying across Auntie's heaving stomach, a woman from the village pulling at something between Auntie's splayed, bent legs.

I run to the mother camel's side, screeching at a vulture perched there. She still pants softly. I throw myself across her swollen belly and grab her spine, pressing myself against her with all my might. There is a small gasp, and I slip off, grabbing the baby's forelegs again, hauling with all my might. An inch of wet shoulder appears. My dress is soaked with sweat from the effort, and I wonder if the inert baby has been poisoned too and whether if he survives the birth he will find a foster mother. In the January sunshine of a day that began with happiness, suddenly death seems easier, more inevitable than life.

I think of Phulan giving birth, still a girl, in a strange bed with a woman she barely knows yanking at a half-born child between her legs. I hear a low wail and realize it is coming from me.

I take the baby camel's face between my hands and his nostrils twitch. Again I grab his forelegs with strength that I believe now comes from God — surely I have none left myself. The baby's chest is out now. Again I fling myself across the mother's belly. She grunts and I know she is still alive, though the vultures stand now on her neck. I scream at them and they flutter lazily.

I haul on his legs, and the baby is half born. I pray for the mother to go on breathing, to keep the baby alive until I can pull him into the world and he can breathe for himself.

I don't know how long it takes, but by the time his back legs are free he is bleating and wriggling, trying to stand. I bite the cord, freeing him forever from his dying mother. When that is done, I turn and look at her. "Your baby is safe," I say. A vulture standing on her forehead ducks its head, and its hooked beak pierces her lifeless eye.

I beat at the vultures again, but they are already tearing at the carcass of the dead mother. I clean the baby with my shawl, trying to ignore the gurgling sounds and the flapping wings behind me. I rub his legs and chest briskly until his soft white fur curls tightly as it dries in the sun. Slowly he becomes more active. All the while he nuzzles me, looking for a teat to suckle.

My legs tremble, and I feel ill. As soon as the baby is able to organize his long, trembly legs, I take my scarf from my neck and tie it around his head and lead him slowly away, back to the rest of the herd.

At the toba, it seems impossible that life is going on as if this had never happened.

We have six new babies in our herd, all healthy and nursing. I take the new one to the other mothers, but they lower their heads and trot away. He follows me closely, as if I am his mother. But I can't feed him, and he'll die if I can't find a nursing female for him.

Under a thorn tree are two of the water pots Dadi and I filled in the morning. Suddenly I am thirsty and too tired to move. The baby and I rest under the tree, and I lift a pot to fill my cup. The baby smells the water and nudges me, gently at first. I dip my fingers into the cup and hold them out to him. He sniffs gingerly, then sucks greedily, grunting. With difficulty I free my fingers to wet them again. Lying under the thorn tree, I feed him until we fall into an exhausted sleep.

When we awaken the sun is lower, and the sky has turned to opal, inevitable dust creeping into the air. In the distance I hear the *kachinnik*, *kachinnik*, *kachinnik* of Guluband's leg bracelets.

"Ho! What's this?" Dadi shouts, climbing down before Guluband can kneel. He runs to us. Phulan is covered head to foot in a chadr.² Now that she is betrothed, she can't leave the house without the billowy veil — and she still can't get down from a camel gracefully while keeping herself covered.

I'm so relieved to see them that the words spill out of my mouth in a jumble, and before I can stop them, tears are streaming down my face again. Dadi listens, inspecting the baby's mouth, ears, feet, and eyes. I choke to keep from sobbing, and he turns to look at me. His eyes are half angry, half hurt.

"Take me to see," he says.

For a moment I stare at him, then I understand that this baby and his mother were part of Phulan's dowry.

I stroke the baby's tiny ears and wobbly head. "I think it was a snake bite." I point in the direction of the flapping swarm of vultures. Dadi goes to have a look.

Phulan sits on the ground, wraps her chadr tightly around her knees, adjusts it over her face, and huddles in its folds. She's so pleased with herself. We are good Muslims, but God doesn't care what color chadr she wears. She has chosen black, and wears it like a martyr.

"You don't have to hide from me," I say, and we're both surprised at the anger in my voice. She lets go of her knees and leans over to push my hair from my face. I can't stop the tears again.

Dadi returns.

"You did well to save the baby," he says, and sits down beside us.

"None of the other mothers will nurse him," I say. "But he'll drink water from my fingers."

"You'll work full time to feed him that way," Dadi says.

Phulan picks up her milk pot and heads toward a female with a yearling that's nearly weaned. A woven bag is tied over her udder. We use most of her milk ourselves. With hope in our hearts, the baby and I follow Phulan. But she shoos us away. We go back and wait under the tree.

The baby bleats softly. I know he's hungry. I untie a cloth wrapped around the chapatis³ from lunch, but the baby isn't interested. The sun is sinking and the air is cooler, the shadows growing longer and less dark.

When Phulan returns, I fill my cup with milk. The baby smells it and stumbles in a hurry to stick his nose under my arm. I dip my fingers into the warm, salty milk, and he nearly knocks the cup from my hand as he grabs at my fingers. Dadi is right. I can't feed him enough this way.

I raise my arm so my fingers point downward, like a mother's teat, and the baby tips his head back to nurse. Slowly Phulan pours milk down the back of my hand so it runs down my fingers into his mouth. His tail flicks, and for the first time today I think he'll survive.

¹ A pogh is a plant.

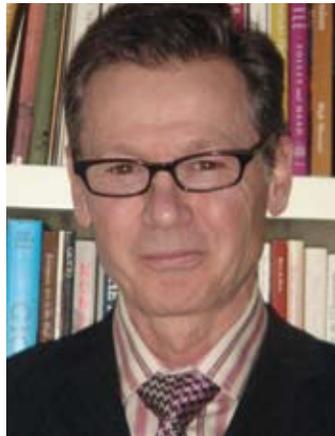
² A chard is the outer garment or open cloak worn by some Muslim women.

⁴ Chapatis is a type of bread.



Hole in My Life

By Jack Gantos



Jack Gantos, who recounts his life story in this book, first thought of being a writer when he was in sixth grade, read his sister's diary, and decided he could write better than she could. He started sitting outside the teacher's lounge at school, listening to conversations, and writing them down. A lot of these conversations made it into his books later on. He is a National Book Award finalist and a Newbery Honor winner.

He always loved to read. There was an abandoned bookmobile next to the local ball field. While his classmates played, he climbed inside and read on his own. In junior high school, Jack Gantos attended a school that was once a state prison. The school removed the razor wire from around the building, but kept the 12-foot (3.6-meter) fence. The concrete guard towers were turned into headquarters for student clubs. When the school bus pulled up, the principal threw a switch to open the electronic security gate. (The principal seemed to enjoy doing that.) The students could see jagged edges above the windows where metal security bars had been removed, as well as old graffiti and carvings in the walls left by inmates.

As a student, Jack Gantos thought jail sounded exciting — though he had no plans to become a criminal. He wanted to be a writer. But a criminal was just what he became. Stuck on the island of St. Croix, where his father is living, he's offered the chance to make some easy money sailing a boat to New York. The boat is owned by smugglers. It doesn't occur to him that anything bad might happen — that he might be killed or arrested. "I just saw my exit from the island and entrance to my future," he says, "and it was glorious and good and calling me and there was no way I was going to get a better offer in a lifetime of sitting on St. Croix. And even if I had

a good job it would take me years to save that kind of money. But now I could do it in six weeks and all for little work and lots of adventurous fun."

The fun ends when FBI agents arrest him and put him in jail. Real prison is nothing like the fantasies Jack Gantos had in junior high. For the first time he realizes he has to take responsibility for himself and work towards his future or else he won't have any. He realizes that living a life based on a fantasy of easy money for little work, stupid risks with no thought for the consequences, and calling himself a writer without putting in the effort to become one, is not the life he wants.

It's difficult for him to make a change in prison, but he's determined to do it. He keeps a journal in the pages of a copy of *The Brothers Karamozov* he gets from the prison library, squeezing his own words between the lines of printed text. In this way, he discovers what it really means to be a writer.



Hole in My Life

For a long time, I had known I wanted to write books, but I didn't have any help and I didn't know what I was doing so it took me a while to figure out what I had to write and how to get started. While in prison, it occurred to me that when I lived at Davy's I could never write about something as unsettling as what I had seen in the hole because when I felt something so intense I jumped up and took a walk or ran to a bar where I had a drink poured into me, and another until I was so numb I couldn't pour anything back onto paper. I didn't have the patience to slow down and see that I had plenty of material to

write about in high school. I just didn't have the confidence and determination to sit still and nurture it properly. My mistakes, my self-doubt, and insecurity got the best of me. Even as I crisscrossed Florida looking for "juicy" subjects, I missed them all. It seemed the harder I chased after a subject, the faster I ran in the wrong direction. Even while living in the Chelsea Hotel while waiting for my sentencing, I spent more time looking into the mirror at my wounded face than I did into my notebook. And the only time I did settle down to write was when I was sitting on the *Beaver* writing in the ship's log. Even then I didn't think I was writing anything of value. At sea I was reading all those great books and ended up thinking I had nothing great to offer in return. But that was untrue.

In prison I got a second chance to realize I did have something to write about. I found plenty of serious subjects. I had plenty of time to write about them and I couldn't get up and run away, or drink, or smoke dope. When I had my fill of serious subjects I began to think about my life before prison, and I found so much more to write about. Prison may have been serious, but from within it, looking out my cell window, I knew life outside prison was more interesting. And as I sat in my yellow cell with my journal on my lap, I understood I had come all the way to prison to realize that what I had in my past was so much richer than what was before me. My struggle as a writer was a lot like my life, I figured. I made up rules for myself and broke them and made others until I got it right.

7/Getting Out

Just as every prisoner has a getting-caught story, every prisoner but the lifers and the executed eventually has a getting-out story. Most of the stories are pretty routine. A man does his time, keeps his nose clean, doesn't get into trouble, and is released when either his sentence runs out or the parole board gives him a date. But some of the getting-out stories are escape stories — mostly attempted escape stories.

When I was at West Street I saw an escape-attempt straight out of a Bugs Bunny cartoon. Three guys had ripped bed sheets into strips and then braided them into a rope. There was an exercise period on the roof and because it was cold we wore big army jackets. When it came time for the escape one guy wound the rope around and around himself and put on the biggest coat he could find. There was a guard tower on the roof and a fence. Two other accomplices faked a fight and drew the guards' attention while the escapee unwound the rope and threw it up over the fence and down. He tied the end to the fence pole and climbed up and over. The second escapee climbed up and over. Then the third. But the bed sheets couldn't hold all their weight and snapped. All three of them fell about four stories. None of them died, but they all ended up in the hospital.

I met a young guy named Quentin, who was an okay kid. He always came off tougher than he was. He was being transferred from a minimum security prison for a court appearance. Some new charges had been filed against him and he was worried. Too worried to go before a judge again. Since he had minimum-security status, he wasn't handcuffed, and as the guard drove past a cornfield Quentin flipped open his door and bailed out. He hit the road, rolled a few times,

then hopped up and ran into the field. The guard stopped the car and hollered for him to come back — he promised he wouldn't tell anyone that he had tried to escape. Just come back and all would be forgiven. But Quentin knew the future charges against him were true and he was crashing through the corn and looking for a way out. He came to a farmhouse, forced open a basement window, and hid in the coal bin for two days. On Sunday the farmer and his wife went to church and Quentin went upstairs, found a set of car keys, and took off in a pickup truck. A few days later, as he stepped out of a grocery store, he was picked up. The truck had been spotted and traced. He never changed the plates.

A group of guys started an "astral projections" circle, where they would sit around a card table and concentrate on breaking down all their molecules into subatomic material and drifting through the fences. That was a waste of time. They went nowhere. Other guys would get furloughs and not return — but were eventually caught. Some guys were on work-release and would walk off the job. But they were always caught. It was always something dumb — like they saw a car with the keys in the ignition, or they went into a bar and got loaded and just decided not to return. Nothing remarkable. There were no daring helicopter rescues, no tunnels, no ingenious plans to dress up as a guard and stroll out through the front door.

Most often the escape attempts were straightforward and totally ineffective — they tried to climb the fence. We all knew it was impossible, but desperate cons like the X-ray tech before me tried anyway. The fence was 12 feet high with triple rows of razor wire on top,

and if you made it over that fence there was a second, identical fence to get over, and there were guard towers with snipers, and bloodhounds in their kennels just waiting to sniff you out. But in the dozen or so attempts I saw or heard about, not one man made it over the first fence. ...

My real getting-out story was nothing like the one I had imagined. First and foremost, I got a new caseworker. Mr. Wilcox retired, and I was assigned to Mr. Casey. He was young, and not yet beaten down by the brutal atmosphere and the frustration of trying to help people in pretty hopeless situations. So I tried one more long shot. I went to him and told him that I wanted to go to college and that if I got accepted to one while still in prison did he think I could persuade the parole board into giving me an early release to go to school.

"I never heard of an escape plan like that before," he said. "If you get accepted to a school, I'll write a Special Progress Report and we'll give it a try."

That was all the hope I needed to get me fired up. I went down to the library and asked the librarian if they had a *Barron's* guide to colleges. They didn't. So I went to Mr. Bow's office and asked him to buy me one. I told him I'd pay him back somehow, but for now I just needed the book.

The next day he brought one in. We pored over it. "Okay," I said, "I want to go to a school with a writing program but I don't have any writing. So let's find a school, any school that has low standards, and I'll offer them cash."

We flipped through the pages and found a small school in New York. Graham Junior College. It was a two-year school with a focus on communication arts. Their motto was “Learn by Doing.” That sounded fine to me.

I sent away for an application. I had Mr. Casey mail my request from his house so the envelope would not be stamped with U.S. Dept. of Corrections, like all outbound prison mail. I used his address for the return. Soon, they responded. I filled out the application, and in my cover letter I made it extremely clear to them that I was not applying for financial aid — that I was a 100-percent cash-paying student. I figured that would speak louder than my mediocre transcripts from Sunrise High School. I also told them that I would like to enroll as soon as possible — in the mid-year January semester. I spent days crafting my answers to a few short essay questions. My caseworker and I decided since the application didn’t ask about arrests or anything like that there was no point in bringing up the subject myself, as it would probably spoil my chances. Mr. Casey typed up the application, wrote a check for the application fee, and sent it back to them.

A few very slow weeks passed and Mr. Casey called me into his office. He had the reply from the college. I ripped the envelope open. I was accepted! I gave it to Mr. Casey. He read it. “Impressive,” he said. And he was true to his word. He wrote out a Special Progress Report on my achievements in the prison, he attached a copy of the college acceptance letter, and he sent it to the parole board for consideration.

This was the real college application. I waited. It was nerve-wracking. My face broke out again. Welts. Boils. Acne. Reservoirs of pus and blood. But I left my face alone this time. I did hundreds of sit-ups. I did push-ups. I sweated it out.

Finally Mr. Casey received a report from the parole board. He ran up to the X-ray room to give me the news. I had a date. December 18th. I was stunned. Nearly 15 months after my first night at West Street, I would be released. I read the letter over and over. There were conditions. I had to have a stable place to live in New York City, and a job. I had neither, and right away I was nervous. Mr. Casey let me call my father. I explained what I needed. A week later he called Mr. Casey. He knew a guy in St. Croix whose mother had an extra room in an apartment in Little Italy.¹ I could live there and pay her rent. And the same guy had a brother who would give me a job selling Christmas trees until I could find a steady job after the holiday. Casey called in the information to the parole board. My release was approved. And I was given walking papers.

8/A Closed Book

On the morning I left I said good-bye to Mr. Bow and Mr. Casey. They had been so helpful. Without them my stay would have been much longer, and my life much different.

I went down to the discharge closet and picked out some clothes. I chose a clean-cut look. No Superfly outfits. No cowboy duds. No black-leather rebel-without-a-cause rags. No fake orange fur. Just a plain pair of dark slacks, a white shirt with a button-down collar, and a jacket with patches on the elbows. I looked like a librarian, and that was fine with me.

In my yellow cell I filled a brown cardboard suitcase with my belongings and carried it down to the discharge officer's station for my final inspection. The guard put my suitcase on a table and flipped it open. He was good at searching things. He had strip-searched me many times. He set aside my two pairs of prison underwear, two pairs of socks, two round-neck white T-shirts, a pair of sneakers, a pair of work boots, gloves, and a wool cap. I also had a drawing pad and colored pencils, a manila envelope with important prison and parole papers, and my copy of *The Brothers Karamazov*.

The guard picked the book up by the spine and tapped it on the table as if he were shaking sand from a shoe. Nothing came out. He flipped open the jacket and saw the prison library seal. "This is a prison copy," he said. "It belongs here." He set it to one side.

I couldn't say anything. The prison seal was stamped in blue ink for both of us to see. My heart was beating wildly. I had to keep that book. My entire identity as a writer was in that book. Everything I had written was squeezed between Dostoyevsky's great lines, as if my words were his discards. But they were all I had.

"It's my favorite book," I said to the guard. "I'll pay for it." I had been given \$40 in travel money, along with my bus ticket.

"I'd like to sell it to you," he said. "But I can't. It's prison property."

I looked down at my feet and kept my mouth shut. I wondered if he would give it to me if I said it was my journal. Or if, like the ship's log, it would only be used against me, and I'd be marched right back up to my cell and locked in until my sentence expired. I was just so nervous to be this close to the door that I zippered my lip.

¹ Little Italy is a neighborhood in New York City.

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Under the Blood-Red Sun

By Graham Salisbury



Graham Salisbury grew up on the islands of Oahu and Hawaii. His family has lived in Hawaii since 1820, when they first arrived as missionaries. His father was an ensign, fresh out of the U.S. Naval Academy on the morning of December 7, 1941, when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. His father died just four years later, when he was shot down on Graham Salisbury's first birthday.

He had a peaceful, happy childhood, but sometimes he would think about what his life in Hawaii would have been like if he had been born just a bit sooner. What if he had been a boy that day in 1941? For months he thought about that "what if?" question. Then he sat down to write the award-winning *Under the Blood-Red Sun*. When he first started writing the story, he wrote from the point of view of the character Billy Davis, but "it did not work. It simply felt flat," he says. "So I put it away and started over."

This time he told the story from the point of view of Tomi Nakaji, a Japanese-American boy. "In Hawaii, I grew up with kids of all kinds of races, including Japanese. But we all shared a common voice. We spoke the same mangled English with great joy and enthusiasm. We all did the same things — surfed, bummed around, went to the movies, ate cracked seed, sashimi, and laulau. We were one huge family of brothers and sisters and didn't even realize it. So why not?" he said. "I could write a book from a Hawaii Japanese boy's point of view ... he might have miso soup for dinner and I might have hominy grits, but in the morning, we'd both head outside and slap hands and cruise down to the beach with our fins and boogie boards and talk trash in the ocean until the sun went down."

He also did research, both at the library and through personal interviews, to make sure he got his cultural facts straight.

In the end, he says he did not write so much about the attack on Pearl Harbor as about "friendship, loyalty, honor, and courage. And adolescent boys dealing with a life situation. This always appeals to me — boyhood issues — friends, fathers, mothers, grandparents, bullies, loners, and that Silent Code of Conduct that all kids have to deal with. And courage, which young people seem to have in great helpings."

Since Tomi's family is Japanese, they are suspected of being spies after the Pearl Harbor attack. Tomi is bullied by a boy in the neighborhood. His father is imprisoned on Sand Island because he didn't fly a U.S. flag on his fishing boat when he went out to sea and was mistaken for an enemy boat. Tomi is determined to see him, even if he must swim to the guarded island by himself.



Under the Blood-Red Sun

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Sand Island

Thinking about Papa being a prisoner drove me crazy. *Shikata ga nai* — It can't be helped. How could Mama and Grampa just accept it and go on like nothing had happened? Didn't they understand that he was a prisoner of war? But he was just a fisherman. He wasn't an enemy to anyone.

When I told Grampa I wanted to go looking for Papa, he got angry and told me to forget it. "You go there, they going shoot you," he said.

"But I'm only a kid."

"They shoot, I tell you," Grampa spit back.

* * *

Dawn. Sky dark and stormlike.

Grampa was already out with his chickens. Heavy gray clouds moved steadily toward the sea. Today I would tell Grampa I was going to see Rico.

But I would go to find Papa.

I put on a sweatshirt and a pair of shorts and make sure my ID card was in my pocket, then left the house as soon as it was light and the curfew had lifted. Leaves swirled around the yard. A shiver ran through me, as thunder rumbled far off in the mountains, muffled by the clouds.

In less than an hour I'd walked all the way to the harbor, down to where the freighters and passenger ships docked.

What I saw shocked me.

All around the water — everywhere — were barbed-wire barricades wound in twisted and jumbled coils from post to post, the wire going all over like it was spun by a lunatic spider. It scared me just to look at it.

To get beyond it to the piers, you had to pass through gates guarded by soldiers.

I waited across the street, trying to figure out what to do next. Sand Island lay across the smooth gray harbor, less than a quarter mile away — a low, flat place covered with scrub brush and a few trees. I could see a white building with a red tile roof out there.

A convoy of army trucks rushed by. Stone-faced men peeked out from under the tarps in back. Behind the trucks, five tanks thundered by, shaking the street. I covered my ears. It was like I was in a nightmare.

The tanks rumbled on, and I crossed the street. How was I going to get over to Sand

Island? I didn't even know if it was an island, or if there was a spit of land that connected it, or some kind of bridge.

Soon I came to where two army guards stood by an entry station. They had pistols on their belts, and steel helmets and dark arm bands that said MP¹ on them. *They going shoot you. ...*

I could see their eyes watching me even though they seemed to stare straight ahead. When I came up to them, they got out of that stiff position. I pointed past the barbed wire. "Is this how you get to Sand Island?"

"This area is restricted," one of the men said. He didn't smile or anything.

"I'm looking for my father. He was ... arrested ... by mistake."

The guard stared at me a moment, then said, "Better go home, son."

"But he's just a fisherman."

"Beat it," the other guard said.

I peeked past them. Nothing but ugly buildings and shipping boxes and a few trucks. A thick raindrop splattered down on my shoulder. The guards slipped army-green ponchos over their heads.

I headed back, and the rain let loose. Big drops bounced off the pavement. Rivers began to run in the gutters. I looked for someplace to get out of the rain and found an arched concrete bridge. I ducked under it and sat on a ledge, huddling next to the stream that ran out into the harbor.

What a stupid idea ... I should have listened to Grampa.

The rain came down harder and the sound was deafening. The river started to swell and cloud with mud. I watched it rush by. Across the harbor Sand Island looked so desolate, a ghostly spit of land and the now barely visible red-roofed building.

It was pretty hard to see that far. The rain beat down onto the water so hard, it looked like it was boiling. But I could make out the shoreline across the harbor. No barbed wire over there. I figured they had it strung out on the other side, on the ocean side where the enemy could land.

Barbed wire!

I hadn't even noticed — there was no barbed wire. Not over there, and not here under the bridge. Nothing between me and Sand Island. I could swim out there . . .

But what if someone saw me?

But it was raining, hard. . . . Maybe no one would be out there looking . . . even if they were, the rain was making everything blurry.

I crawled along the ledge under the bridge to the harbor side. No people on the docks and no ships moving around, not even any small boats. It was a long swim, but I was sure I could make it.

Then I remembered the tugboats, like sharks with big magnetic teeth that pulled you under. I'd seen them moving ships up to the pier, huge, sucking propellers churning the ocean white behind them, making giant, ugly whirlpools. If one of those things came by while I was out there, it would chop me into shreds.

Another stupid idea.

But . . .

I took my ID card out and stuck it in a crack on the ledge, then covered it with my sweatshirt. If I lost that I'd be in more trouble than I wanted to think about.

The water was cool, but not cold. I dropped down into it and let the stream carry me out into the harbor, keeping low so I'd look like something floating, a coconut or some piece of junk in the water.

The rain thundered all around me. I turned and looked back. No one was on the bridge. Still no boats, or anyone on the pier. When the force of the stream died out I started swimming . . . breast stroke, keeping low, making as little movement as possible. I accidentally swallowed a mouthful of oily, fuel-smelling water, and gagged. I tried to keep from coughing.

Pull. Easy, steady. Looking back. Watching for boats.

About halfway across the harbor I started to get tired, but at least I could stop worrying about being seen by anyone on shore.

Sand Island . . . were there guards there?

The rain started to let up. It would pass soon.

Move . . . stop thinking about being tired. . . . Keep going, keep pulling.

I didn't realize how tired I really was until I felt the soft touch of watery sand under my feet. I crawled out and stumbled up the small beach to sprawl in some weeds. The rain still fell, but not as hard as before. I curled up into a ball and thought about going back into the water where it was warm. But I stayed hidden in the weeds.

Soon the rain slowed to a drizzle, then stopped. A breeze brought the soft rumble of surf from out on the reef on the other side of Sand Island. It must have been about noon. I rested awhile, then crawled up to the flat land above the beach and into the waist-high weeds.

They going shoot anybody try go there. . . .

Grampa was right. I should just be dutiful. I should be respectful and obey everything he says. *Papa should beat you. . . .*

But I was so close.

I crawled to a thicket of kiawe trees and studied what I could see of the white building. The whole island wasn't that big, maybe a half mile long and a quarter wide. I inched closer, hiding behind the trees.

The weeds broke onto a sandy field riddled with puddles. And beyond that, the prisoner camp.

My chin dug into the sand as I lay flat, straining to see. The camp wasn't much more than a barbed-wire enclosed yard of sand with a bunch of tents set up in neat rows. Beyond that was the white building, and a couple of smaller buildings.

But there was still the open field. How was I going to cross *that*? I could wait until dark and then crawl to the trees on the other side ... but I had to be home before dark, before curfew. I should just get out of there.

Strange.

No guards. No prisoners. The place seemed deserted. Had I made a mistake? Had I come all this way just to find nothing?

The few trees that stood near the prison fence weren't that far away ... about as far as from a pitcher's mound to center field. But it felt like three times that much. It was now or never ... now or never.

I crouched and kept low to the ground. My feet thumped over the sand, making huge splashing sounds when I hit the puddles. I dove to the ground and rolled into some weeds around three trees. I lay there panting.

In the camp nothing moved. Where *was* everyone?

I counted more than 30 tents sitting in muddy dirt and sand, some shaped like pyramids and some like a sheet staked down over a clothesline. If Papa was there, was his tent near the fence?

The fence, I suddenly realized, was two fences, with about 10 feet between them. You'd almost have to shout to talk to someone.

I waited, shivering. Wet shorts and no shirt.

After a while, a long line of men came filing out of one of the smaller buildings. When they got to the tents they broke up and went inside, or just gathered in groups in the yard. A few wandered toward where I was, talking to each other in low voices and looking at the dark sky. They were all Japanese. Still no guards in sight.

I recognized a fisherman I'd seen before ... a friend of Papa's. He wandered into one of the pyramid tents that was near the fence. Too far away.

In a few minutes he came back out. My heart pounded with each step. Closer ... closer. "Pssst," I whispered.

The man stopped and looked around, out into the field, then back toward the tents.

"Over here." I stuck my head up out of the weeds, then quickly ducked back down.

When he saw me he looked around to see if anyone else had seen. "Lie flat!" he commanded, then walked casually over to stand right across from me.

I parted the weeds and peered through. He stood with his hands in his pockets, looking up at the sky as if checking to see if it was going to rain some more. "Who you? What you doing here?" he said, without looking in my direction.

"Tomi Nakaji," I said in a shouting whisper. "I'm looking for my father, Taro."

He glanced in my direction, then quickly turned away. "No move, boy ... the guards see you, they going shoot." He started to walk away, then stopped and looked at the sky again. "No even breathe."

He went into a tent and came back with Papa.

Papa looked ... awful. Unshaven and grimy, far worse than after a month at sea without a bath. He walked slowly, limping. He used a stick for a cane. I wanted to call out to him, to jump up and run over to the fence. I could explain to

the guards that they were all wrong, that they had an innocent man. But Grampa's words screamed through me: *shoot you, shoot you, shoot you. ...*

"Tomi!" Papa whispered, not looking my way, a deep scowl on his face.

"Papa, I — "

"Shhh! No say nothing. ... You listen to me. ... Stay in that trees until nighttime, then go. ... You hear me? Go!" Papa looked scared. I felt sick.

He waited there with his friend, both of them scowling at the ground. Papa leaned on his stick, and once peeked over at me. The look on his face was as sad and lonely as I'd ever seen it. His friend said something to him and put his hand on Papa's shoulder.

Finally, Papa whispered, "Tomi ..."

I lifted my head a little so he could see.

"You very brave ... but also ... Tomi, you tell Mama not to worry ... Tomi ..."

I wanted to call to him, to tell him I would get him out of there somehow ... but I kept quiet, like he'd said.

A guard came out into the yard from the white building. Papa's friend urged Papa away from the fence. They separated, and Papa limped to his tent and sat between two mud puddles on a small stool. He sat straight, like Grampa, the stick lying across his lap. He stared out into the wet weeds, away from where I was, his weary eyes sagging.

It was almost unbearable to be so close and not be able to do anything but dig down into the dirt. I had to force myself to stop thinking about it before it made me crazy. I started thinking about food. But the thought of eating made me feel sick. And so did the salty smell of the wet, mushy sand I was lying in.

An hour passed ... maybe two ... or three. Papa never stopped guarding my hiding place.

I fell asleep, then woke with a twitch, suddenly remembering where I was. My neck was stiff and hurt when I moved. A blotch of sand clung to one side of my face. I wiped it away and ran my fingers over the grooves it left in my cheek.

I got up on my elbows and peeked over the weeds. Papa was gone. Everyone was gone. It was getting dark. They must have gone back into the building.

Night came down and hid the open field. I crawled back out of the trees and sprinted across the sand and puddles to the kiawe thicket, then slowed to a fast walk and picked my way through the weeds to the harbor. I must have been crazy to think I could help Papa. *Crazy!*

The water was warm and black.

The city across the harbor hid in a dark silhouette of buildings. An island with no lights. I swam slowly, evenly, trying to pace myself so I wouldn't get too tired. Except for the hum of a small-boat engine somewhere, the harbor was quiet. Off to my left a blue light moved steadily across the water. I waited until the boat passed, hanging in the water with only my hands moving back and forth.

I aimed toward where I thought the bridge was. It seemed like days since I'd hidden under it.

The cool, fresh water rushing out from the river pushed me away from the bridge. I had to swim harder. I turned and worked into it on my back, face to the sky. The clouds had cleared. There were stars by the millions. Seeing them like that, so peaceful, made me sad. And lonely.

A thrumming ...

Churning.

Tugboat!

I swirled around, looking for it.

Blue lights bore down on me, growing larger.
Sickening gray-white wake.

Boiling wake.

I lunged toward the bridge, my arms so tired they dragged me under. I came up, gasping. The *thrum* grew louder. I could hear the swishing of water shooting out from under the hull, and a voice crackling over the tug's radio. A giant shadow loomed over me.

The sucking grabbed at my legs, dragged me backward.

Sucked me back toward the churning prop.

Nowhere to go but down. I went under, trying to dive to the bottom. Get out of the way.

Down.

The tug thundered above.

Down, down to where the water turned cold.

The tug passed and the sucking stopped.

I waited as long as I could, then clawed my way back up. My lungs felt like they would explode. I broke the surface, gasping for air. My legs and arms could barely hold me up. Swim. Swim to the bridge.

Swim ...

The ledge was slippery with moss. For a few minutes I just hung on to it, then dragged myself up, the sharp concrete edge digging into my hands and scraping my legs. I lay panting in the dark, my mind dizzy with fear and exhaustion. I fell asleep without knowing it.

Sometime later I was awakened by a kick. A flashlight with a blue-painted lens burned into my eyes. A bayonet poked at my throat.

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Tough Guys

"Identify yourself, and don't move or I'll run this thing through your neck. You have a name, boy? Where's your card?"

An inky black shadow above me. Soldier. MP. I fumbled around in my pockets, then remembered I'd stuck it in a crack. "It's over there," I said pointing behind me, afraid to move.

The man moved the bayonet away from my throat. "Get it."

I eased up and rubbed my neck, then inched over to get the card. The MP took it and shined the blue light on it. Quickly, then shut it off.

All black. No moon.

"What are you doing down here?"

"Nothing ... I was just swimming, that's all."

"At night? Don't you know there's a curfew?"

"I fell asleep." I squinted up at him. Too dark to see his face.

"Get up and come with me."

The soldier backed away. I crawled out after him, shivering. "Don't be stupid, kid ... this curfew business is dead serious." He paused a moment, the stream quietly lapping past, sounding less swollen, less stirred up. The MP seemed to be thinking about what to do with me. "Count yourself lucky this time," he finally said. "But I'll tell you this — if I ever catch you here again, you're not getting off so easy. ... You got that?"

"Yessir."

"Where do you live?"

I pointed up toward the mountains.

"How far?"

"Three or four miles, I guess."

"You're a little far from home, aren't you?"

"Yessir."

The soldier studied me, his face faintly visible. My back itched. Salt mixed with boat fuel and river mud.

"Come on," he said. "I'll drive you home. ... I don't want anyone shooting a kid."

I followed him out to the road. The dark blur of an army jeep was parked there, half of it up on the sidewalk. Another MP sat in the driver's seat smoking a cigarette. "What you got there, Mike?"

"Jap frogman."

The soldier in the jeep snickered, then looked me over. The tip of his cigarette glowed, cupped inside his palm.

"We're driving him home."

The other soldier got the jeep going. The man with the rifle nodded for me to get in the back, then he got in the front. We drove away fast. I put my sweatshirt on and gripped the bottom of the backseat, shivering from the cold and trying to keep from rolling out when we sped around the corner and headed on up toward the mountains. The headlights were painted out, so you could barely see the road.

I showed them how to get there. But when we got to my street they wouldn't let me out by the trail that led to my house. Instead, they drove up the Wilson's driveway and swung around in front of the house. The place was dark. Blacked out. I started to climb out, the jeep idling like an old sampan. I prayed Mr. Wilson wouldn't hear it.

"You don't live here, boy," the driver said.

"Next door," I said softly. "My mother works for the people who live in this house. ... She's their maid. ..."

The driver smirked and shook his head.

"Go on, get home," the other man said. I jumped out and watched them drive away, the small pinholes of red from the painted-over tail lights vanishing as they turned out onto the road. The sound of the engine quickly died away.

Silence. Dark. So dark I couldn't even tell where the trees ended and the sky started.

The Wilsons' front door creaked open and someone stepped out onto the porch. I dropped down. "Who's out there?"

Mr. Wilson.

"You'd better speak up. ... I've got a gun."

The floorboards creaked as he moved around. I found a stone and tossed it over to the other side of the driveway.

Bam! The sound of Mr. Wilson's .45 shattered the still night air. I took off, running toward the trees.

Bam!

A bullet thwacked through the branches above me.

Bam! Bam!

* * *

Mama stood up when I walked into the kitchen. Kimi, who'd been on her lap, ran over and hugged my legs. Mama smiled at her, and Kimi let go and ran back. Mama put her arm around Kimi and looked back at me, her face hardening. "Where you been?" she demanded.

Grampa drilled me with his eyes, his scowl hard and angry.

Kimi buried her face in Mama's apron and started whimpering. She must have known something was wrong. Grampa told her to hush.

"I — I saw Papa."

Mama let out a gasp and moved over to the table. Slowly she sat down. She turned away from me.

I moved over next to her and kneeled down on one knee. Mama turned back and touched my damp shirt. "You smell like oil. ... Tell me where you been." I waited a moment before answering, looking at the floor. "Sand Island," I finally said.

No one moved, or even seemed to breathe ... even Kimi.

“He’s okay ...” I told Mama, speaking quietly, shamefully. “He said to tell you not to worry.”

Suddenly Grampa slapped his hands on the table. Kimi jumped and leaned over to bury her head in Mama’s shoulder. “*Usotsuki!* You liar!” Grampa said, burning me with fiery eyes. “You no can get there. ... You *no can do!*” He stood and leaned toward me, his hands still on the table.

“No, Grampa, I’m not lying,” I said, standing up. “I saw him. I swam across the harbor and saw him —”

“Tomi, hush!” Mama said.

Grampa sat back down. Tears came to Mama’s eyes and she quickly wiped them away.

“I know what I did was wrong,” I said. “I shouldn’t have gone there —”

“Oh, Tomi,” Mama said, holding Kimi close, rocking her. The candle on the table flickered in her wet eyes. A wave of dread ran through me. How could I have been so thoughtless? How could I have thought only of myself? “I’m sorry, Mama. ... I’m sorry.”

Mama tried to smile, but couldn’t.

Grampa went out the back, banging the door open and letting it slap shut behind him.

I waited a few moments in the deep silence that followed, then went to my room and put some dry clothes on. I lay down on my bed and stared into the darkness.

Mama’s shadowy shape appeared in the door.

She put a plate of *musubi* on the bed. “You must be hungry,” she said. I took one and almost ate it in one bite.

“We not angry, Tomi. ... We were afraid ... afraid for you. I look in *ojii-chan* eye and I see how he is so worried about Papa, just like me. And then you were gone too.”

Mama sat on the bed next to me and put her hands in her lap. “*Doh sureba iino?* What would we do with Papa gone, and you gone, and Grampa with the stroke? We need you, Tomi. We all need to be together, to help each other.”

I sat up and put my arm around Mama. “I had to know if Papa was ... was alive. ... I just had to know, Mama. I promise I won’t do anything like that again.” I leaned my head against her shoulder.

Mama patted my head. “*Daijobo-yo*, Tomikazu. It’s all right.”

We sat that way for a moment longer, then Mama said, “You very, very brave, but we need you to be brave here.”

After another moment of silence, Mama pushed me back and stood up to leave. “You sleep now.”

I lay back down, my head spinning. Brave? Mama had a husband who had been shot and arrested, a son who didn’t think, and who had almost gotten himself killed, an old man who couldn’t work anymore, and a five-year-old who was afraid just to go outside. Who was left to keep us going?

And Mama was calling me brave.

What a joke.

¹ MP stands for military police.

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A Girl Named Disaster

By Nancy Farmer



Nancy Farmer grew up on the border between the United States and Mexico. She says, “It taught me that good people are an endangered species that need to be protected at all times. I have a bleak viewpoint of all governments and dislike borders of all kinds.”

She enlisted in the Peace Corps after graduating from college and later become a lab technician in Zimbabwe. She lived and worked for several years on Lake Cabora Bassa, the same lake that her protagonist, Nhamo, travels on in the story. Many of the incidents in *A Girl Named Disaster* come from Nancy Farmer’s real life-experience. “The cholera epidemic, Rumpy the baboon and his troop, getting groomed by a baby baboon, hiding in a tree from a leopard, living off a leopard kill — all these things happened,” she says. “I found the leopard kill on Nhamo’s island when we had been eating nothing but fish for weeks. It was a dead kudu¹ that was too heavy for the cat to drag up into a tree. We (the camp cook and I) looked around very carefully before cutting off one of the legs. I remember lifting the leg — which was extremely heavy — over the water to our canoe, to get the heck out of there before the leopard came back. It was a beach of black sand, volcanic, and the water was transparent. As we carried the leg, blood dripped off into the lake and tiger fish, predators with long teeth, leaped out of the water and snapped at the drops.”

Because Nancy Farmer lived in Africa for so long, she felt more comfortable writing about African characters than American ones. But she still did a lot of research for her book. She was careful to verify every fact in *A Girl Named Disaster*, including what ceremonies were performed by the Shona² at what times. The book won a Newbery Honor.

Nhamo’s mother was killed by a leopard

when Nhamo was only three. She has never known her father. After a cholera epidemic, she travels with her Aunt Chipo and her grandmother and uncle to see a *muvaki*, a spirit doctor. The doctor, having secretly studied the history of her family, claims that Nhamo is to blame for the epidemic. Her father killed a man years before, and the man’s spirit — *ngozi* — wants revenge.

Nhamo’s Aunt Chipo, who was jealous of Nhamo’s mother and resents the attention Nhamo’s grandmother pays to her, claims to be possessed by the victim and demands that Nhamo be given in marriage to the victim’s brother as a junior wife. For Nhamo, this is a death sentence. The old man already has wives who will want to get rid of her.

Nhamo sees no way out until her grandmother secretly tells her to run away. She must take an abandoned boat and paddle to Zimbabwe where her father’s family lives. Nhamo takes with her a picture from a magazine that she pretends is a picture of her mother. Nhamo is alone in her boat, blown off-course and lost, but she communicates with the spirit of her mother, and others, including the water spirits, called *njuzu*. She comes close to starvation. Then she steers her boat onto an island populated by a tribe of baboons.



A Girl Named Disaster

Chapter 29

“Once upon a time a farmer lived in the middle of a forest full of baboons,” began Nhamo. It was late at night. Her nerves wouldn’t let her sleep, so she decided to tell Mother a story.

Nhamo hugged the grass-filled grain bag, and she had mother's jar nestled next to her face. She knew the leopard wouldn't be a problem until he finished eating the kudu, but he was still out there.

"The farmer could never relax," she went on. "Day after day the baboons looked hungrily at his mealies.³ But every time they tried to get them, the farmer would pelt them with rocks from his sling.

"Finally, the chief baboon said, 'My brothers, we are never going to get those mealies. That man is much too watchful. He can make mistakes, though. He never guards the goat pen because he doesn't know we can eat meat.'

"Hoo! Hoo!" cried all the other animals. 'Let's go raid the goat pen!'

"They killed a goat and roasted its meat. 'Do you know what would be really funny?' suggested the chief baboon. 'Let's sew our droppings into the skin and prop it up outside the farmer's hut.'

"Hoo! Wow! What a great idea!" cried the other animals. They filled the skin with baboon droppings, sewed it up, and propped it against the farmer's door. Then they hid in the bushes to watch.

"Soon the farmer came out. 'Good morning, my fine nanny goat. What are you doing out of your pen?'

"The goat didn't answer.

"Well, don't stand there blocking the door. Get out of the way," said the farmer, but the goat didn't answer. The man shouted at the animal and then, when it *still* didn't answer, he lost his temper and kicked it.

"Maiwee! The stitches flew apart. The goatskin exploded and sent baboon droppings all over the hut. The farmer was furious. 'Wah! Wah!' cried the baboons, falling all over themselves with laughter.

"I'll get them back for that," the man said as he swept and washed out his hut. He dug a deep pit in front of his garden and covered it with branches. Then he lay down on the trail to the forest and pretended to be dead.

"The baboons discovered him. They pushed and prodded him. He didn't move. They sang:

'The farmer is dead, hii!

What has killed him, hii!

He died of grief for his goat, hii!

With what can we repay him, hii!'

"We'll have to bury him," said the chief baboon, so they carried the farmer into the forest and dug a grave. It was hard work, and soon the animals got bored.

"Who cares if the hyenas scatter his bones," said the chief baboon, wiping his face. "The good thing is, he's no longer around to throw rocks at us. Let's go raid the mealies."

"The baboons left the farmer and hurried back down the trail. They raced to the garden, fell into the pit, and were all killed. The farmer lived happily ever after and never had to worry about his plants again."

Nhamo hugged the grain bag and listened to sounds in the night. She heard the usual mutter of the baboons. They couldn't be too worried or they wouldn't talk.

It's going to be more difficult to finish the boat now, Mother said.

"I shouldn't have put it off," moaned Nhamo. *There's always something dangerous in the forest. You'll just have to be more careful.*

"I can't work with that creature around!"

You don't have a choice, Mother pointed out.

The waves are as big as elephants during the rainy season, said Crocodile Guts from his soft bed in the njuzu⁴ village.

Nhamo got up and sat on the edge of her platform. She watched the starlit cliff with its murmuring baboons until dawn.

As she had hoped, the meat dried steadily during the night. It hadn't spoiled. As soon as the baboons were gone, Nhamo built up the curing-fire. Clouds of smoke billowed up through gaps in the platform, adding a flavor as well as preserving the meat. Now and then she turned the strips to expose both sides.

"I can't possibly work on the boat until this is finished," she explained to Mother. Then, to keep from feeling guilty, Nhamo devised a method to protect her stores. She took two of the now-useless fish traps, plugged the small ends, and hung them by long ropes from the highest branch of the lucky-bean trees. The branch extended out over the grassland. She could pull the fish traps back by means of a string.

"I can store the meat inside, *Mai*. The birds can't reach it, and the baboons can't jump that high." To be on the safe side, Nhamo built a low fire on the ground below. If Rumpy tried anything, he was going to get a hot foot.

In the middle of the day, Nhamo made a quick trip for water. The stream was dry now, and she had to depend on the lake. She put the panga⁵ in the sling with the calabashes and kept the spear handy. She half intended to raid the kudu carcass again, but when she got to the shore, the antelope was gone.

All of it.

The leopard must have dragged it into a tree, she thought. The rock looked perfectly clean, though, without a trace of blood. Or perhaps there was blood. Nhamo was too unnerved to check closely.

In the afternoon she packed the fish traps with dried meat and suspended them from the overhanging branch. Well satisfied, she went to the stream to gather a few blackjack leaves for relish. The stream was dry, but a cool dampness still clung to the soil.

Oo-AA-hoo! The sound brought her instantly alert. The baboons were back early — and they had come almost silently. Suddenly, they were all around her in a milling crowd. It wasn't the chaotic, screeching mob she was used to. The animals slipped through the grassland like the vervet monkeys near the leopard cave. Even Tag was impressed with the seriousness of it. He rode on Donkeyberry's back without a single murmur.

Nhamo shivered. The males were unusually irritable. They snapped at one another and threatened the females. Now that the troop was close to the sleeping cliff, the animals spread out and applied themselves to digging in the soil. That in itself was unusual. At the end of the day the baboons preferred social activities: grooming, entertaining infants, lounging in friendly groups. They were clearly ravenous. Something had kept them from feeding.

Rumpy sniffed around the smoking-platform, barking as a coal singed his nose. He spotted Nhamo and trotted up, fur bristling, to demand the meager bunch of blackjack leaves. "Go away!" shouted Nhamo. Rumpy slapped the ground. She snatched up a stone and hurled it accurately at his head.

Rumpy danced back and forth with fury. He didn't cower as he usually did when she hit him. She suddenly realized he was dangerous. She grabbed the spear, which was lying against the thorn barrier, and quickly unhooked the ladder. As it flopped down, she thrust the spear at the angry creature to drive him back. Rumpy sprang forward instead.

He sent Nhamo crashing to the ground as he rushed to grab the ladder. His foot smashed her face into the dirt. By the time she recovered, he was already on the platform, raging through her possessions. His big teeth crunched into calabashes to get at the food inside. But what he really wanted — and could obviously smell — was the meat.

He hopped from branch to branch. He caved in the delicate smaller platforms. He found the fish traps hanging from the rope, but he couldn't reach them. The branch was too slender, and he didn't have the sense to pull them in with the string. Rumpy bounced up and down in the tree in a perfect fit of rage.

Meanwhile, Nhamo had grabbed a burning branch from the fire. She was terrified, but her survival depended on protecting her stores. She swung up the ladder and shoved the flames onto Rumpy's face. He flinched back. She clambered around him, trying to drive him out of the tree.

Rumpy was beginning to lose his nerve. Nhamo approached him like a small and utterly reckless honey badger. She screamed insults. She cursed his ancestors. She felt like she wouldn't mind sinking her teeth into his throat.

Wah! shouted Rumpy. He dodged past her. His twisted foot stumbled against Mother's jar, and he fell with a shriek over the edge of the platform. Mother's jar rolled after him before Nhamo could reach it. It smashed open, and the picture, caught in the afternoon breeze from the lake, fluttered off and landed in the cook-fire.

Nhamo almost fell out of the tree in her haste. She ignored the fallen animal as she raced for the picture. The same puff of wind that had blown it away stirred the coals in the fire. They flared up briefly, caught the paper, and burned it to ashes before Nhamo even got close.

She knocked the coals aside with her bare hands, ignoring the searing pain in her fingers. But it was already too late. The picture blew away like the ashes that had been beaten in the mortar so long ago in the village, the day Vatete⁶ died.

Ambuya⁷ ... , they whispered. Sister Chipo ... Masvita ... beloved Nhamo. Please do not be frightened. I must go now. I know you will follow when you can. The ashes floated off on the wind, carrying the message.

Chapter 30

Nhamo lay on the platform. The ruins of her belongings lay around her, but she didn't bother to check them. The sun had passed over the trees once or twice since she had crawled to her present bed. She had drunk water — Rumpy hadn't been interested in those calabashes. She had eaten nothing. What was the point? She didn't even put her arms around the grain bag. She couldn't bring herself to touch it.

Below, the baboons ransacked the smoking-platform. Nhamo turned on her side and watched a line of ants move up the tree trunk. Perhaps they had found their way to the kudu meat. What difference did it make?

Once she stirred enough to climb out onto a branch to relieve herself. She saw that Rumpy no longer lay on the ground, so he must have survived.

More time passed. It was dark, then light again. She saw Fat Cheeks with Tag draped over his shoulders, and Donkeyberry searching the

remains of the calabashes on the ground. Rumpy appeared. His limp was far worse. He moaned to himself as he struggled along, and the other baboons seized the opportunity to bully him.

The water ran out. Nhamo's tongue stuck to the roof of her mouth. Her body smelled strange — not dirty, exactly, but old, like a musty cave where animals had laired for a long time. Her head ached. It doesn't take long to die of thirst, she thought dully. She didn't think she had the strength to climb down the ladder.

Darkness came, and with it a cooling breeze. The sound in the leaves was like water rushing across the sky. The moon was growing again, and its milky light spilled through gaps in the tree's canopy.

I'm on my way, little Disaster, said Crocodile Guts. He had a string bag hefted over his shoulder. *My relatives have brewed beer and my oldest son has bought a goat to sacrifice at the coming-home ceremony. It'll be good to see them again.*

Nhamo didn't answer.

I suppose Anna will be there. I hope she's forgiven me for dying first. Crocodile Guts scratched his hair thoughtfully. *I would have liked a sacrificial bull, but times have been hard recently. My sons have promised me a bull as soon as they can afford it. I'll probably have to remind them.*

Nhamo watched him stride along the bottom of the lake as easily as a man on a forest trail. Just before he moved out of sight, the boatman turned and called, *The njuzu might be lonely for a while. Don't be surprised if they pay you a visit.* And then he was gone.

First Mother, now Crocodile Guts has deserted me, thought Nhamo. She watched the cool moonlight slide along the platform. The baboons stirred on their rocky perches. An eagle owl called as it floated along the upper airs.

Sh sh. Something was moving in the grass below. *Hhhhhub,* came a sigh. Nhamo tried to ignore it. So what if something wanted to kill her? She wanted to die.

The sound went on, *sh sh.* Of course, she wanted to die on her own terms, not some horrible beast's. Her plan was to stay on the platform until her spirit was driven away by thirst. She had seen people die of cholera. Eventually, they fell into a fevered sleep that deepened until they simply let go. There were worse ways.

Nhamo put her eye to a gap in the platform. Two njuzu girls were weaving around the thorn barrier, looking for a way up. They lengthened their supple bodies until they were thin enough to slither between the thorns.

Nhamo felt a chill pass over her. She was too dehydrated to break out in a sweat.

Up they came until they reached the first foot hole Nhamo had carved into the tree trunk, before she made the ladder. Now the njuzu did a very strange thing. Instead of sliding around it, which they could easily have done, they searched until they found a fragment of wood. It might have been part of the storage platforms Rumpy had smashed.

One of the snakes carried the wood to the hole in her fangs and the other butted it into place with her head. In a moment the rift was healed. They went on to the next hole, and the next until the trunk was smooth again. Then they came to the ring of birdlime.

Nhamo had put it there to discourage the caracal.⁸ She wanted to see how the njuzu would handle the problem. They slithered down the tree and gathered up dry grass. Back and forth they went, gluing the grass to the birdlime until it was covered up. When they were finished, they glided over it as smoothly as if they were rustling across a rock.

Nhamo had to admire their cleverness, but she realized she was about to have njuzu in her bed. She wanted to die, but she did *not* want snakes crawling all over her first! She crept to the other end of the platform. Her body trembled with the effort.

The njuzu coiled over the edge with their eyes glittering in the moonlight. One of them found a calabash Nhamo was certain was empty and dived her head inside. Water droplets twinkled as she rose again. Her mouth brimmed with water.

“No!” cried Nhamo, clinging to the trunk. “Go away!”

One snake twined around the girl’s body, *ssuh*, and came up by her face. She lightly caught Nhamo’s lower lip with her fangs and pulled the girl’s mouth open with surprising strength.

“Aaugh!” Nhamo gasped. The other snake bent over her mouth and poured the shining water inside. It was cold, cold! It sank into her body like a frog diving into a lake. At once the njuzu shook themselves loose, rippled over the rim of the platform, and disappeared.

Nhamo was shocked to the very depth of her being. She clung to the tree, shivering violently. She had swallowed something offered by the njuzu. Did that mean she was condemned to live with them forever? Or did the rule only apply to food? One thing was certain: Her determination to die had completely vanished. Now she passionately wanted to live. She only hoped she wasn’t too late to try.

Nhamo’s first chore, as soon as darkness lifted, was to get water. She was badly dehydrated. Her skin was loose and her ears buzzed, but she was filled with a kind of strength that had been missing the day before. She dipped the calabash — the one the njuzu had used — into the lake and drank repeatedly. She lay under a tree to let the water take effect.

After a while she returned to the lucky-beans and ate some of the dried meat. The whole day was spent drinking and eating. She noticed the tree trunk was still scarred by foot holes and the birdlime barrier was still intact. Was the njuzu visit only a dream?

But that night they were back, filling the holes in the bark again and gluing grass to the barrier. This time they didn’t force Nhamo to drink. They murmured to each other as they rustled through the branches. Nhamo couldn’t understand what they were saying, but the sound was oddly comforting. She fell into a deep sleep and when she awoke, they were gone.

Nhamo couldn’t quite put her finger on it. She was sitting by the mukwa⁹ log, trying to shape the outside of the boat, when it came to her that something had subtly changed about the forest. The light was different. The sky remained as cloudless as ever, and the heat was even more oppressive than usual. Her body was covered with sweat that wouldn’t dry.

Then she realized what had happened: Buds were swelling on the branches of all the dry trees. New leaves were forcing their way out. A subtle green hue hung over the forest. And that meant ...

The rainy season was on its way.

During the dry season many of the forest trees lost their foliage. But unlike the vines and grass, they didn’t wait until the first rains to start growing again. They knew somehow that the

storms were about to arrive. Nhamo had seen it happen before. In two or three weeks towering clouds with swollen purple bottoms would rise out of the east. Branch-cracking winds and thunder that shook the bowl of the sky would descend on the island, along with torrents of life-giving rain.

She hadn't a hope of finishing the mukwa log by then.

Nhamo was appalled. She couldn't possibly cross the lake during the storms. She would have to stay on the island until the next dry season. Alone.

Nhamo stumbled back to the platform and lay in the shade of the lucky-bean canopy with her chest heaving. She wanted to cry — or scream — or throw something hard. So many emotions ran through her, she couldn't decide which one to feel. All she could do was lie there and pant. *Alone.*

The baboons returned full of complaints. Hunger and heat made them irritable. Nhamo watched Rumpy creep from one to another, trying to beg a grass root. They all shouted at him. He was again the scrawny bag of bones she remembered from the little island. Poor Rumpy, she thought. The high point of your life was when you knocked me down.

Nhamo lay back on the grain bag and tried to think. The grinding hunger that tormented the animals would go away when the rainy season arrived. Antelope would have young, and birds would build nests. Perhaps the leopard would return to its cave.

She wouldn't be able to build fires on wet days. She wouldn't be able to work on the boat. And all those months alone ...

But look on the bright side, she told herself. The island would be full of food. The streams would run again, and the fish traps will become usable. This year she could plant her garden at the right time, although rising lake water might make it difficult to reach the little island.

By evening Nhamo was almost reconciled to the situation. She munched a strip of dried kudu meat and choked down some of the horrid, tasteless water-lily bulbs as she made plans. She would rebuild her platforms and make a watertight shelter.

The full moon rose as the sun set. It was going to be one of those restless nights with the baboons awake and the dassies¹⁰ foraging.

Rumpy tried to climb the cliff and failed. His foot was swollen. Perhaps he had fallen on it when he tumbled out of the tree. He managed to reach a low shelf, where he ensconced himself in a crack.

The njuzu hadn't visited since the two nights after Crocodile Guts left. Nhamo was frankly relieved. She hugged the grain bag and considered telling a story to pass the time until she felt sleepy. Tell who a story? she thought sadly. Rumpy wasn't going to listen. He had cowered from her since she had thrust the burning branch in his face. She could hear him groan even now as he fidgeted under the bright moon. Anyhow, an animal wasn't the audience she wanted. She wanted *people*.

Oh, fine, she thought. If I can't get through one night on my own, what am I going to do in three months?

Cough-cough.

Her mind went blank.

Cough-cough.

That sound. She remembered it from the banana grove outside the village.

Cough-cough.

Silence.

What was it doing? Was it standing under the tree? She remembered the leap the caracal had made to pluck a dassie from a rock. How high could leopards jump?

Cough-cough.

Farther away now, it was moving toward the cliff. Nhamo let her breath out carefully. The baboons were absolutely still. Not a single infant whimpered. The troop might have vanished off the face of the earth. The dassies, who had been twittering to one another, had turned to stone. The whole grassland held its breath.

Then, a scream.

It was a terrible, wailing shriek, so much like a human that Nhamo stuffed her fist into her mouth to keep from crying out. It went on and on in ghastly agony. From her earliest childhood that scream came, with a memory of flowing, spotted skin and rending claws, and later of Ambuya tearing out her hair when they brought mother's bones home from the forest.

And then it stopped.

The grassland waited.

The bright moonlight shone through the leaves, and water-laden air pressed on Nhamo's skin.

After a while a baboon infant whimpered. Its mother grunted softly in response. *Whow-whow* called a nightjar in a breathless voice. One by one the inhabitants of the grassland came alive. They were no longer in any danger. The leopard had selected its prey and they, with heartless ease, returned to their usual activities. The dassies twittered. A ground hornbill uttered its low, panting call.

But something had been subtracted from the chorus of night noises. Rumpy's characteristic moan as he moved his injured foot was no longer present.

¹ Kudu is the name for an antelope.

² Shona is the name of an ethnic group in parts of Zimbabwe and Mozambique.

³ Mealies is a type of corn.

⁴ Anjuzu is a Shona water spirit that, according to tales, can take on the appearance of a snake.

⁵ Panga is a boat.

⁶ Vatete means aunt.

⁷ Ambuya is a person's name in Zimbabwe.

⁸ A caracal is a type of wild cat found throughout southern Africa.

⁹ Mukwa is a type of teak tree.

¹⁰ Dassies are small African rodents.

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Make Lemonade

By Virginia Euwer Wolff



irginia Euwer Wolff grew up in a log house in Oregon that had no electricity. She did have many books, and those became

her most valuable possessions. She based *Make Lemonade* in part on her own life as a young, overwhelmed mother. She says, “When I was a young mother I had to put my babies in an old, plastic high chair from the Salvation Army (a charitable organization) that I could never get clean. ... Jolly, Jilly, and Jeremy came straight out of that dirty high chair.” Jolly is a 17-year-old single mother with two small children, baby Jilly and toddler Jeremy.

When Virginia Euwer Wolff began writing *Make Lemonade* she didn’t write in traditional paragraphs. Instead, she broke her lines as if they were being spoken. Ultimately, she thought that was perfect for the audience to whom the book is dedicated: young mothers. “I wanted young girls in Jolly’s situation, maybe pregnant or with babies, and maybe going back to school, to be able to say, ‘I read two chapters!’ In the amount of time they had, with the amount of concentration they could muster, I wanted them to be able to get through the book.”

Fourteen-year-old LaVaughn answers Jolly’s smudged ad: “Babysitter needed bad.” To LaVaughn, Jilly and Jeremy are sloppy and drippy kids who “got their hands into things you’d refuse to touch.” But something about them keeps LaVaughn coming back. Maybe it’s the way Jeremy reaches for her hand “by his own decision.”

Jolly isn’t always easy to get along with, either. LaVaughn doesn’t like spending time in her dirty apartment. She has plans for college and is saving her babysitting money for tuition. When Jolly loses her job at the factory she is no longer able to pay LaVaughn’s salary. But LaVaughn continues to work. She’s grown to care

about the two children. She toilet trains Jeremy and teaches him his numbers. She brings home a handful of lemon seeds, hoping to show the children how things grow.

LaVaughn’s mother isn’t exactly thrilled, especially when the job starts to have what her mother thinks is a bad effect on LaVaughn. Her grades suffer because she is distracted. LaVaughn’s mother believes people like Jolly “need to take hold” — and is worried LaVaughn will be drawn into Jolly’s problems at the expense of her own future.

LaVaughn has no intention of letting that happen. Meeting Jolly makes her even more aware of how easily life can spin out of control. She’s determined to help Jolly take hold. She gets Jolly enrolled in classes at the local high school in a special program for young mothers. Jolly takes courses in office training and child care — and swimming classes. Jolly doesn’t see much use for swimming, but she also learns CPR¹: “It’s how you save somebody’s life.” Jolly doesn’t expect to ever use what she’s learned, until the day Jilly swallows a plastic spider.



Make Lemonade

Chapter 63.

What I’ll never forget
when I’m long gone out of here
and this place is all torn down with a bulldozer —
What I’ll never forget —
It was the sound in Jolly’s voice when she said
that one word to Jilly.

It was only the fault of Jilly being a baby,
but still you want to be mad about such a thing
and you don't know what to be mad at.
Except the universe.

It was Jolly's voice when she
said that one word to Jilly.

Jilly she's having herself an afternoon
of doing wrong things at the rate of 1 per minute.
She turns on the stove knob and then
she puts the eggbeater in the toilet
and then she rips the 3-fish page
halfway across in Jeremy's book
and then she spills the Night Danger Red bottle
on the sofa and then
she aims her mother's ballpoint pen
in the light socket.
Mr. Jeremy he's mostly too busy to notice.
She also misuses Legos
by putting them up her nose and in the stove.

But it was one of those plastic tarantulas, black,
with all the long, bendy legs and great big smiley eyes,
they're sposed to hang in a car dangling down
and turning all around
bouncing to see the traffic.
I should have known.
Jolly should have known.
Mr. Jeremy himself should have known,
even being not even 3.

One minute Jilly's sitting on the floor all happy
talking in her language to the jungle spider,
and the next thing I know,
she's completely sputtering and waving her feet
in a fight with Jolly
who's trying to keep her from kicking —
You ever hear a baby coughing in a squeak not even their
own voice?

I was at a standstill.
Jilly's feet were punching everywhere,
and when her face came jerking around under Jolly's elbow
it was all red blotchy in a panic.
Jolly is bending over looking deep in her mouth
and then she turns Jilly over,
and she whacks her on her back, solid with her flat hand,
even with Jilly squirming in confusion
and making that squeak sound —
and then she turns her over frontwards,
pushes Jilly's shirt up out of the way,
she pushes on that little chest with her fingers,
but Jilly's fighting her with her hands all beating
everyplace Jolly touches this red baby.
Jolly's determined, she has such a face on her,
this is a war with whatever it is inside Jilly.
Jilly's sound is too bad to be true
and Jeremy he knows it and he stands completely still
on the floor.

Jolly she flips Jilly over and whacks her on her back
with her flat hand 4 times
then Jilly she almost flips over again
and Jolly pushes on her chest with 2 fingers 4 times too.
Then on her back 4 whacks, then on her chest 4 presses.
Jilly's turning color.

"Call 911,"² says Jolly in a voice
that could get the 911 people there already,
a voice nobody couldn't pay attention to.

Me, I'm going for the phone
and Jeremy's already there
and I see like a close-up of a movie,
he has the receiver up to his face
and he has his two fingers on the 9
and he pushes the button and lets it go just right
and I grab it and do the remaining pushing,
1 and 1 real fast.

Now Jilly's lips are going blue and black,
and Jolly has her flat on the floor
with her face completely asleep and her body —
you don't want to hear — it's so limp
it looks like this is the big one nobody planned for
and 911 answers
and I don't know what to say but
I tell them where
and I tell them who when they ask.
I tell them, "There's a baby, she's blue."
They pay attention real fast.

Jolly she's on the floor,
she has Jilly's chin up in her one hand,
and she's blowing into her nose and mouth both
while I'm talking
and then she has her fingers on Jilly's little fat arm up high
and she holds her fingers there
and she says, "There's a pulse but no breathing"
and she blows again
in Jilly's mouth and nose
and I say the same thing to the 911 phone,
"There's a pulse but no breathing." 911 says to me
is there a qualified CPR card holder on the scene.
"No," I say. I don't think fast enough to understand.
Then I remember back to Jolly's homework
and brachial pulse.
And I go silent not knowing the answer
and I'm watching Jolly's head swinging back and forth slow,
regular,
blowing into Jilly and then looking sideways at her chest.

Hurry, I tell the 911 phone, and I tell them again,
to speed them up.
911 says somebody is on their way, they'll be here soon
and I should hang on the phone
and listen to what they tell me.
Jolly's fingering Jilly's brachial pulse again
and this time she says "I can't find no pulse"
between her blowing into Jilly's nose and mouth.
I tell the 911 phone the same thing as Jolly says,

"She can't find no pulse,"
and they tell me they're gonna instruct me on the phone
and they begin saying we need to tilt the baby's head,
not too high
and open the airway
and do just exactly what Jolly's already doing.

But I tell them I didn't mean actually No back there
when they asked.
I say I meant Jolly didn't have her test yet, no card yet.
I tell them she's got her two fingers on the baby's chest
and she's pushing
and she's blowing in the baby's mouth and nose
like they must have done in her CPR class
where she goes to school.
The 911 phone tells me again the ambulance
is on their way and we should just hang on
and keep doing it.
Is there somebody can go outside and meet the paramedics,
they want to know from me.
I don't even know the answer to that one,
But I tell them Yes.

Jilly's too still.
Jeremy stares and grabs Jolly's arm and holds on.
Jolly she doesn't change what she's doing,
she's a machine now,
blow slow once, press Jilly's chest 5 times,
blow slow once, press 5 times,
it keeps going on
and you could scream with all the not knowing.

It's then Jolly says the word to Jilly, between blowing.
She says in a voice I never heard in her or anybody else,
a voice like an animal somewhere out in the dark
all reaching all alone,
she makes such a sound,
so clear I never heard a word so clear in my life,
or so soft,
"Breathe, Jilly."

There was sunshine coming in the window, and 911 was talking on the phone
so I knew the world was going on,
and yet there was Jilly, like a stranger,
not even there.
Jolly kept blowing and pushing.
I kept wondering how it looked inside Jilly.
Was it complete dark?
And I never knew if Jilly ever heard her mother say that word or not.

And it went on and it went on.
Jolly she didn't say anything again.
And the sound of her blowing into Jilly's nose and mouth was all there was and it went on and on.
And the vomiting sound —
the puking,
the miracle shaking Jilly's neck —
the throwup coming out and the spider leg hurled up and out
and the vomit — real live human throwup —
and we all jumped and watched
and Jilly sputtered and screamed herself back into her life and 911 kept saying, "Are you still there, are you still there?"

And I ran to meet the ambulance
down the stairs of course,
the elevator being broke like always.
There they were,
up they came running with me,
and their kits and their uniforms
and their voices.

And they took a look around
and started handling Jilly still screaming
and her mother sat there on the floor and put her finger in a throwup puddle and felt it like you'd test the water.
One of them was finding Jilly's brachial pulse
and they were asking Jolly questions
and she was still there on her knees
with her one finger standing still in the puddle of throwup

and she answered them
and breathed hard, she was so tired.

I'm trying to explain to Jeremy
and hang on the phone
and explain to them what's happening
and I don't know how everything turns out
except Jilly's going to the hospital and Jolly too.
"She'll need a neuro³ check," says one of those paramedics,
and "We don't know she didn't aspirate something," says another;
and we all go out the door and down the stairs.
It happens like in somebody else's life because it's too much for just one family of Jolly and her 2 kids,
a parade of 7 people going down the stairs,
one of them being carried and still crying.

The siren made spectators,
now we're a show
with all their equipment
and Jolly walking along
with those eyes of hers
watching Jilly being lifted in the ambulance.
One of them puts out his hand to Jolly and she stares at it.
Then he waves it up,
"Come on," and she obeys it and gets in.
Jolly says something to Jeremy and me through the glass
but we don't know what it is
and I am in charge of Jeremy's disappointment
about not understanding any of this surprising event
of the day and they start the engine and begin to move.

Chapter 64.

Jilly and Jolly are gone away in the ambulance.
Jeremy and me stand on the sidewalk holding hands
among the onlookers
who have got real interested in Jolly's life all of a sudden.

Mr. Jeremy is one confused person,
he hasn't got a clue about hospitals,
being that he doesn't remember being born.
"Jilly nap in truck"
is about as clear as he's gonna get for now.
I listen to the folks muttering Jeremy is a poor little kid
and his sister too,
and I don't believe them.

This comes as a surprise even to me, me not
believing.
Maybe before, but not now.
How many of these neighbors
ignoring Jolly for her ignorance and bad luck
could go down on their knees
and save their kid from choking to death
this afternoon
while the world was going on outside in the sunshine?

Jeremy in his big deep glasses too. Not even 3 yet
And he punched the 9 on the phone.
He's pulling on my hand now,
he wants to run around the corner to see the ambulance
going on down the street.

"Jeremy, you did the 9 on the phone," I say to him,
pulling him in the opposite direction, away from the street.
"That was a real smart thing to do," I compliment him.
"Sure," he kicks a chicken bone from somebody's garbage.
"You did a good job," I tell him again.
"Sure. Leben over dere," he tells me.
I look where he's pointing.
Three dogs are nosing around the Dumpster,
one of them looks pregnant, all bulging and hanging.
"Three dogs," I say to Jeremy. "One Dumpster."

All at once I don't want to go back to Jolly's house.
It's not Jilly's throwup —
it's not that. I look down into Jeremy's tunnels to his eyes.
"Jilly nap in truck?" he asks me.
I tell him Yes. I think about what the paramedic said,

"They'll do a neuro check." And I'm thinking about Jolly,
How she held on and held on.

Back in Jolly's living room
I quick apply some soap and water to Jilly's throwup
and I scrub it with a towel
and I hang the whole mess up in about 5 minutes,
because me and Jeremy are getting out of here.

I quick call my Mom at the office
and I tell her Jeremy's coming to our house
probably to sleep over.
My Mom she says Sure
in her voice that's betting Jolly's done something stupid.
"We'll just be there, that's all," I tell my Mom,
and I'm on the edge of getting rude
so we say Good-bye.

We pack Jeremy a bag including his blanket and a truck
and 2 books,
and he says Sure he wants to see my house.
I explain Jilly gets to go to a great big hospital,
Jeremy he deserves a trip, too,
and we're gonna go on the bus
and he can help carry his clothes
in the grocery bag I found under the sink.

I leave a note for Jolly
so she'll know.

Mr. Jeremy tells 2 riders on the bus
all about Jilly threw up
and she's taking a nap in the truck
and Mommy hit her and blowed on her.
This isn't the way I'd tell it, but I sit there
listening to the 2 ladies admiring how straight he sits
like a good boy
and shaking their heads what a shame it is to hit a child.

Me, I'd tell how Jeremy pushed the 9 on the phone.
And I'd tell how Jolly never once stopped

doing what she was doing
to save her child from dying in front of her on the floor.
I sit on the bus holding Jeremy's clothes in the
grocery bag
and I look at his legs swinging back and forth
hanging down from the seat
and I don't say anything
till it's time for him to get up and pull the cord for our stop.

Chapter 65.

I show Jeremy where he gets to sleep
on the sofa, we put his blanket there
and we take out his truck and his 2 books he chose,
the one about the crab
and also the tool book that tells about shovels and wrenches.

And we tell my Mom how it happened.
"Tell my Mom what you did, Jeremy,"
I tell him down from where I'm sitting
on the conversation stool in the kitchen.
It's been the same stool
all the years I remember.
It's where I sat when I got her to say Yes I could sit for Jolly.
Jeremy's walking around
with my Mom's pan lid on his head.
"Jilly in truck," he tells my Mom,
Looking important under his hat.

My Mom is poking potatoes with the kitchen fork
to bake them. I tell her,
"You know Jolly she had to take swimming with Jilly
and in the same period they had CPR classes,
and she had to do the brachial pulse
and the proper procedures all perfect,
she still hasn't had her test yet?"
My mother's attention is on this subject,
a potato is in her hand.

"Well, she just saved Jilly's life today," I tell my Mom,
"2 hours ago."
and I watch her face very careful.
She does the proper thing, instantly.
She praises Jolly. To me and to Jeremy.
"Your mommy she's a hero,"
she bends down to give him the news.
I tell her about the spider leg coming jumping out
in Jilly's throwup
and my Mom rolls her eyes and she praises Jolly again
and I go on giving her all the information,
about the blowing and the pressing,
and how Jeremy punched the 9 on the phone.

Now my Mom has discarded the potato and the fork
and she picks up Jeremy and whirls him around
and says how proud she is he's a hero too,
and I truly bite my tongue
not to get spiteful
about her getting spiteful before
about Jolly not taking hold.

¹ CPR stands for cardiopulmonary resuscitation, an emergency medical procedure that can revive a person who is choking or has had a heart attack.

² 911 is the number you dial in the United States for emergencies.

³ "Neuro" is short way of saying "neurological."

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