

A LITTLE ORANGE IN THE BIG APPLE

by
Valarie M. Vine

Smashwords Edition

* * * * *

Published on Smashwords by:
Valarie M. Vine
A Little Orange in the Big Apple
Copyright 2009 by Valarie M. Vine
Cover credit: Katrina Joyner

All rights reserved. Without limiting the rights under copyright reserved above, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form, or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise) without the prior written permission of both the copyright owner and the above publisher of this book.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, brands, media, and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. The author acknowledges the trademarked status and trademark owners of various products referenced in this work of fiction, which have been used without permission. The publication/use of these trademarks is not authorized, associated with, or sponsored by the trademark owners.

Smashwords Edition License Notes

This ebook is licensed for your personal use only. This ebook may not be re-sold or given away to other people. If you would like to share this book with another person, please purchase an additional copy for each person you share it with. If you are reading this book and did not purchase it, or it was not purchased for your use only, then you should return to Smashwords.com and purchase your own copy. Thank you for respecting the author's work.

* * * * *

TABLE OF CONTENTS

[Quote](#)

[Dedication](#)

[1: Waiting to Go Home](#)

[2: Sweet Alison](#)

[3: The River](#)

[4: Christmas Eve with Family](#)

[5: Chicken Heads and Walnut Shells](#)
[6: Returning Soda Pop Bottles](#)
[7: Germans in the Back Yard](#)
[8: Dick and Jane vs Alice in Wonderland](#)
[9: A Place Called New York City](#)
[10: Grandma Agnes' Warning](#)
[11: Ali and Reynolds Get Their Wings](#)
[12: First Look at the Big Apple](#)
[13: Father and Son to the Theater/Mother and Daughter to the Park](#)
[14: All Alone in New York City](#)
[15: Little Apartment in the Big City](#)
[16: A Hurricane Followed by a Walk in the Park](#)
[17: No Trick or Treating Allowed](#)
[18: First Snowfall](#)
[19: The Rink and the Square](#)
[20: The Drug Store](#)
[21: Valentine's Day Surprise](#)
[22: A Parade, a Pinch, and a Goodbye](#)
[23: An Eventful Year](#)
[24: Reynolds Sings in the Choir](#)
[25: A New Best Friend](#)
[26: Dining Out with Ernie](#)
[27: Keep Your Eye Upon the Donut](#)
[28: Spring Prom, Graduation, and a Visit from Father](#)
[29: Strange Dream—Ali in Wonderland](#)
[About the Author](#)

* * * * *

“California is a nice place to live, if you happen to be an orange.”

—Fred Allen

•
For my mother, Virginia

* * * * *

1: “Waiting to Go Home”

Ali’s heart was beating hard as she leaned back on her swing and with all her might pumped as high as she could into the air. It wasn’t just because she was trying to touch the gray sky with her brand new cowgirl boots (with little orange-colored rivets at the top). She was excited about going home for a entire week. It was Christmas week! Her mother would be able to stay home from work, and she wouldn’t have to stay at Mrs. Amity’s boarding home for a whole seven days.

“You are my sunshine, my only sunshine, you make me happy when skies are gray-----”, sang Ali as she struggled to go higher on the swing while she waited for her mother’s car to appear in Mrs. Amity’s driveway. Her blonde ponytail almost scraped the ground as her legs pointed upward in a straight line toward the gray sky. She was excited and very ready to go home.

Ali’s bag of oranges was on the ground near the swingset. She had picked them especially for her mother and the other relatives who would surely be coming for Christmas dinner. The leaves were flying through the air and whirling about the backyard reflecting Ali’s excitement at seeing her mother any second now. Ali was all alone on the swingset and the last kid still waiting to be picked up for Christmas vacation.

“Ain’t you gone home yet?” yelled Mrs. Amity’s mother who lived in a little dilapidated cottage in the back yard. Ali’s heart sunk slightly. Mrs. Amity’s mother was so mean. Sometimes she came storming after Ali and the other kids with a tree switch as they picked oranges from the tree in the backyard. Boy, did it sting when the old lady switched at them and caught their arm or leg. “Stay away from my tree, you little street urchins,” the old lady would always yell. Ali wasn’t sure what a street urchin was, but she was sure it wasn’t good.

“Your mother not here yet, dear?” said Mrs. Amity from the kitchen window of the main house. She was a nice lady who ran the boarding home. How could she be so nice

and her mother so mean? Maybe the old lady didn't like living in the little house in the back yard away from everyone. Maybe she just didn't like kids. The only thing Ali would miss at her boarding home was Mrs. Amity's breakfast waffles and the little ice cream cubes they had each night after dinner. Ali, still swinging high, and out of breath yelled, "She's not here yet, Mrs. Amity."

Just then a big car rolled up in the driveway, immediately sounding three loud and long "HONK, HONK, HONK's". It wasn't Ali's mother, but her Grandma Agnes. "Watch me jump off, Grandma!" yelled Ali who was proud of how high she had reached into the overcast sky on the swing.

"HONK, HONK, HONK", Grandma Agnes returned by pressing on the car's horn.

"Watch-----watch me jump," implored Ali.

To Ali's horror, Grandma Agnes was pulling back out of the driveway. She was leaving without her! Ali frantically let go of the chains on the swing and flew through the air, twisting and turning, and landing in the bushes next to the driveway. "Ouch!" Ali winced as she rubbed her scraped knees through her cut overalls. She was hurting, but at the same time quickly grabbing for her bag of oranges and running wildly down the driveway and then down the sidewalk trying to catch up with Grandma Agnes' car.

"Wait for me, wait for me," wailed Ali, tears starting to roll down her cheeks, partly from the pain of her bleeding knees and partly from the fear of being left behind.

The car stopped abruptly and Grandma Agnes reached over and shoved open the car door on Ali's side.

"You come when I honk the first time---do you understand, Ali?" said Grandma Agnes, sounding like her teacher and waving her finger at Ali.

"Hurry up and get in," added Ali's Grandma impatiently.

Ali climbed into the car and sat there with tears in her eyes, holding the bag of oranges with one hand and rubbing her bleeding knees as best she could with the other hand.

"Such an inconvenience," said Grandma Agnes who was chewing gum and looking back and forth at Ali and the cars ahead of her. "Your mother calls at the last minute and asks me to pick you up. I have presents to wrap! I'm not sitting around waiting to run errands and pick up kids," she added indignantly. Ali's Grandma suddenly demanded the

windows be rolled down.

“I’m hot, we need some air in here”.

Ali thought that was odd, since it was December and actually kind of cold outside. Ali tried to roll down the window on her side, but her oranges began falling out of the brown bag and rolling around on the car floor. In an instant, Grandma Agnes pulled to the curb, stopped the car with a jerk, leaned down and started throwing all the oranges onto the street.

“Those darn oranges will roll around and cause me to have an accident. Really, Ali,” huffed Grandma Agnes.

The car pulled back into traffic. Ali turned around in the front seat and got up gingerly on her scraped knees in time to look through the rear window. Her oranges were rolling around in the street, getting squashed by traffic, one by one.

* * * * *

2: “Sweet Alison”

River Street was coming up. There was their little house. Despite Grandma Agnes’ wild drive home, it was good to be at her real home. Ali was limping up the driveway that her mother was watering down before company arrived. Ali walked straight to her mother and hugged her leg and looked up at her.

“Hi Angel-----what’s the matter?” inquired Ali’s mother who could see Ali had been crying.

“I wanted to show Grandma Agnes how high I could jump from the swing, but she started to drive away, and, and I hurried and when I jumped, I ended up in Mrs. Amity’s bushes and scraped my knees,” said Ali in a torrent of emotion while holding tight to her mother’s leg. Just then Grandma Agnes walked by on the way to the house.

“That daughter of yours, a dilly-dally little rowdy she is,” Grandma Agnes said while shaking her head and disappearing into the house.

“Mother, I’m not a dilly-dally little rowdy. I just wanted someone to see me jump.” Tears started to well back up in Ali’s eyes.

Ali’s mother leaned over and turned the spigot to shut off the water. She sat down on

the porch step, pulling Ali onto her lap, and began rolling up the tattered overalls of her little girl.

“How many times have I told you to slow down and be careful when you’re playing, Ali?” said her mother tenderly. A few drops of water from the hose was dripped onto her mother’s bandanna and placed gently on both of Ali’s scraped knees to absorb the little bit of blood. Ali began feeling better while being tended to by her mother.

“I think you’re going to make it---such a little wild one you are.” Her mother smiled while rocking Ali back and forth in her arms.

There was a little growth of white flowers growing alongside the porch step where Ali and her mother sat. Her mother reached over to break off a small bunch of the flowers for Ali while she continued to rock her gently in her arms.

“This is Sweet Alison just for you, Ali. It grows wild around our house and is very much like you. In fact, I named you after this little flower.” She handed the little bouquet to Ali.

“Really?” inquired Ali “after these little flowers?”

“Yep,” said her mother. “Somehow, I knew Rose or Daisy or Chrysanthemum just wasn’t going to be the right flower name for my little girl.”

“Chris-sand-the-mom?” repeated Ali with a puzzled look on her face. Her mother laughed.

“No you are definitely like Sweet Alison---wild, and bright, and sweet and growing like a weed!”

With that, Ali’s mom gave her a kiss on the forehead, set her back on the walkway and gave her a little swat on the backside. “Now go and find your brother. We’ve got company coming tonight and I’m sure I don’t have to remind you that someone special will be arriving late tonight---”

“Daddy??” Ali asked loudly, interrupting her mother.

“No, Sweetie, not Daddy-----Santa on his sleigh with all the reindeer and presents,” replied Ali’s mother with a wistful smile. Ali’s tears were now dried as she thought about Santa and the reindeer, and of course, the presents. It was still a little sad to think that her father would not be there. Her father and Santa were kind of alike; they were both busy doing important things most of the year (Santa made toys and her father sang songs), but

when they did come for a visit, it was wonderful!

* * * * *

3: “The River”

Reynolds suddenly appeared from the house, the screen door slamming as he walked toward his mother and his sister.

“Now what’s happened? You’re always falling down or something,” said Reynolds to his little sister, shaking his head and sneering at her as always. Despite her brother’s obnoxious greeting, Ali felt kind of special, like a wounded cowboy on a television show, like her hero Hopalong Cassidy who walked with a limp.

“Mother gave me flowers.” She proudly held them up to Reynolds.

“She said I was named after them.” Reynolds grabbed his stomach in a big pretend laugh saying, “Yeah, you’re like a flower. Like Flower the skunk in Bambi.” He roared with laughter at that.

Their mother quickly snapped at Reynolds, “Leave your sister alone. You two don’t see each other for a week and right away, you’re squabbling. For heaven’s sakes, it’s almost Christmas Eve! Let’s get moving and get ready for the big night!” She shook her head from side to side looking at both of them and muttering something about “getting along” as she disappeared through the front door into the house.

Reynolds looked at Ali, made a face and said, “See ya, squirt”. Same old Reynolds, Ali thought.

Ali ran into the house, directly to her room that she hadn’t seen for a week. She counted all her stuffed animals and was relieved to find them all there. She picked up her favorite, Smokey Bear, who wore a ranger hat and overalls and held him close while saying, “Only you can prevent forest fires” in her best and deepest, Smokey Bear-like voice. Setting Smokey back on the bed, she grabbed her trusty six-shooter and caps and took off to the river which was directly across the street.

While crossing the muddy field that led to the river, she would every now and again pull out her six-shooter, pretending to shoot at a “bad guy”, like on television. “Take that you varmint---bam-bam-bam---get out of my Valley and don’t come back,” threatened

Ali against her imaginary opponents. Ali was still hobbling like Hopalong Cassidy as she made her way to the concrete walkway that angled down to the river. She wasn't supposed to go to the river, especially without her older brother Reynolds who was 11 years old. "I have my gun, ain't nobody gonna mess with me," she said out loud with more of her cowboy slang learned from watching westerns when she got home from school.

The river was made of gigantic slabs of concrete with high walls that went for miles and miles through the San Fernando Valley. It was usually dry during the hot summer months, but by the time Christmas arrived, there was often some water flowing down the middle, sometimes a lot of water after a big rain.

Ali slipped through the gate that said, "No Trespassing." She knew what the sign meant, but somehow it was easy to ignore. Who knows, there might be badmen down there to shoot and take to jail, Ali imagined. She began inching down the walkway that led to the river with her back against the wall, holding her gun pointed into the air. She was ready for whatever might be around the corner. She jumped out and began shooting her cap gun. "Meow", howled a stray cat that happened to be sniffing around for crawdads by the water's edge. The snapping sound of the caps in Ali's gun scared it. The cat ran low to the ground for a short distance, finally stopping and looking back at Ali, then slowly walking away.

"Sorry kitty, I wouldn't shoot you", Ali said contritely. Ali loved animals. She would love to have a cat or a dog, but with her father gone all the time and her mother working, pets were "out of the question" as her mother would say.

Looking in one direction, way down the channel, and then the other, Ali didn't see too much of interest. Some water with a bit of moss, but no craw daddies to retrieve. Some trash here and there, but no shopping carts from the supermarket that somehow ended up in the river. The best things to find were soda pop bottles that she and Reynolds would take back to the supermarket nearby for money. Sometimes as much as 30 cents could be made on a good afternoon. No bottles today. The other neighborhood kids who didn't go away to a boarding home during the week and lived there all the time, probably already got the good stuff.

"Ali are you down there?" she heard Reynolds say from somewhere way up along

the wall of the river channel. “You’re going to get it from Mom if you don’t get out of there and get home right away,” Reynolds declared authoritatively.

Ali looked straight up the concrete wall and saw her brother’s head in a glimmer of sunlight and then all of the sudden “splat”, a big gob of spit landed on her forehead. A direct hit.

“HA-HA-HA-HA----- that was a good one,” Reynolds said as he laughed wildly. Ali wiped the spit away with her sleeve like any cowboy would do and shot her last few rounds in the air in the direction of Reynold’s voice.

“Take that you varmint”, she said as she ran with a bit of a limp, homeward.

* * * * *

4: “Christmas Eve with Family”

Ali hurried through the front door and discovered Reynolds telling on her as usual, “Yep, she was down in the river again, Mom”. “Ali,” her mother said in exasperation, “get those muddy boots off and throw them on the porch.” Grabbing Ali’s arm, she ushered her toward the bathroom.

“Get into the bath and clean up and put that gun away for heaven’s sake. Grandma Agnes, Uncle Mack, Aunt Lurline, and Uncle Dan will be here in a little while!”

“Oh, boy----Uncle Dan! Is he still wearing his uniform? Is he bringing his rifle, again?” Ali whooped.

“Just get into the tub and I mean now,” said Ali’s mother. How special it would be with both Santa and Uncle Dan coming! It was Ali’s Uncle Dan who had sent her the little red and gold jacket with dragons embroidered on the front for her birthday a couple of years ago. Uncle Dan had been in a war someplace a long way from the Valley and was back home now. Her mother had shown Ali the place on the globe where her Uncle Dan fought in the war; the place was colored in red and kind of looked like a dragon’s head. Uncle Dan was sort of like a cowboy because he had a gun and rode in a tank (although a tank was definitely not as good as a horse thought Ali).

Ali’s mother loved Christmas. She decorated everything in the house, especially the little Christmas tree in the living room. Lots of presents were tucked under the tree

already and, of course, Santa would be bringing even more later on. Reynolds made another face at Ali and went down the hall to his room.

“Mom, I’ve got a couple presents to wrap---be out in a while”, he said shutting his door against any intruders, especially his little sister.

Ali took her bath, got dressed in her beautiful dragon jacket from Uncle Dan and some clean overalls, and came out to the living room. Her mother always played pretty Christmas music on the record player in between rushing around in the kitchen trying to prepare dinner. Caroline Spain, Ali’s mom, was down on her knees near the Christmas tree putting the picture of her husband next to the old plaster Santa that had one arm upraised as if saying “Merry Christmas!” Ali’s father was almost never at home. He was “on the road” in a show her mother explained. George Spain, Ali’s father, was a singer. A long time ago when Ali was quite little, she could remember him singing a song called “It’s Gonna Be a Great Day.” He would sing the words and then hit a note on the piano over and over. If it wasn’t for the picture her mother put under the tree, it would be hard to remember exactly what he looked like.

“Hello,” came a familiar voice from the front door “anybody home?”

“Come on in, come on in,” Caroline yelled from the kitchen. In came all the relatives, talking and pointing, laughing and walking into the kitchen where Caroline was busy preparing dinner. Hugs all around and for Ali an occasional pat on the head.

“Well, you cleaned up pretty good, my little wild child,” said Grandma Agnes with a sniff. She had dropped off Ali, then gone back home to wrap those presents that she was so upset about. Uncle Mack, grandma’s brother, was right behind her.

“Well how is my little San Fernando Ali? Still shooting desperadoes in the neighborhood?” Uncle Mack was funny. Everyone always laughed when he called her “San Fernando Ali.” He couldn’t hear too good. Ali had to yell back, “Hi Uncle Mack.” Aunt Lurline, grandma’s sister, looked down at Ali and for about the millionth time called Ali a little tomboy and was off to the kitchen to help Caroline.

“Uncle Dan”, Ali yelled as she ran toward her very, very tall uncle. His head almost reached the ceiling!

“How’s my little niece?” Uncle Dan reached down and swooped Ali high into the air.

“I scraped my knees when I fell off the swing at Mrs. Amity’s,” Ali said as she pointed down at her knees. “Let me kiss them,” said Uncle Dan.

“I see you’re wearing that pretty little jacket I sent you from Korea.” That was the place on the globe that looked like a dragon, Ali thought. Uncle Dan then lifted

Ali up to the ceiling like an airplane and flew her around the living room as she stretched out her arms and yelled “Zoom, zoom ----ouch,” as she accidentally bumped her knee on Uncle Dan’s head.

“Careful, or you’ll crash the plane kid,” Uncle Dan joked.

There was lots of activity in the kitchen. All the women were grabbing this bowl or that bowl to help prepare the dinner. The men were putting together a makeshift table in the living room. “OK everybody, to the table now, time to say grace,” said Caroline. The family took their places around the table and placed their napkins in their laps and then looked at Caroline. There were only seven people around the table, but it was wonderful to see everyone, all gathered together. It was so rare that everyone was together. Caroline started to say grace, but stopped as she looked at Reynolds.

“Don’t touch anything on the table until we give thanks,” instructed Caroline with her head bowed, but with her eyes fixed on her son. Reynolds put his hands back down in his lap. Ali smiled and thought at least her mother saw that---- he doesn’t always get away with stuff like reaching for the drumstick first.

“Thank you for all our blessings and for our family gathered together this Christmas Eve night and for those far away,” Caroline said as everybody nodded their heads in agreement. “And may George’s show do well, and be a big success for him,” she added with a smile.

As everyone began to pass the food around the table, Caroline asked if they liked the music she had just begun playing on the record player.

“What on earth is that music----it isn’t Christmassy,” pointed out Aunt Lurline in her snippy, old-fashioned way.

“It’s the Broadway album of “Kismet”, George’s show,” responded Caroline.

“Kiss who?” asked Uncle Mack while dipping into the mashed potatoes. He held his hand up to his ear since he couldn’t hear so well.

“Kismet”----it’s the name of George’s show. It just opened a couple of weeks ago on

Broadway.”

“What a silly name for a show. What does “Kismet” mean anyway?” Aunt Lurline said.

“It means something like destiny or fate or the way things are. Listen to the music,” Caroline implored her family.

“Well, why then didn’t they call it “Destiny?” ‘Kismet’-----that sounds foreign to me,” Aunt Lurline added disapprovingly. Ali looked at her elderly aunt and wondered if there was anything she did like. She always seemed to find fault with things. Ali’s favorite song from the record was the one where a man sang “Rhymes have I” with rhyming words like “a camel’s a mammal.”

Caroline gave up trying to play the “Kismet” music. She turned on the radio to a station playing Christmas carols and sat down at the table once again, wiping her brow lightly with her napkin.

“Such a good meal, Caroline, too bad George can’t be here,” said Grandma Agnes as she dished some cranberries on to her plate.

“So where is he now?” asked Uncle Mack leaning forward so he could hear the answer.

“He’s in New York City”, answered Caroline.

“Where did you say he is?” said Uncle Mack again.

“NEW YORK CITY”, yelled Caroline so Uncle Mack could hear her. Ali softly said to herself “New York City”.

“Where is that, mother?”

“A long way away,” Caroline said wistfully. “I’ll show you on the globe later, Honey.”

“I don’t know why he leaves you here all alone to look after the kids while he goes all over the place singing songs. I never heard of such a thing. A family should stick together,” Aunt Lurline sniffed.

“He has a beautiful voice and singing in a Broadway show has always been his dream,” explained Ali’s mother.

“Yep, I remember,” said Grandma Agnes. “It was the day Ali was born when he announced that he got a job singing.” She said singing like it was a bad thing to do. “You

remember Caroline, you had to remind him that Ali was just born,” Grandma Agnes added looking down at Ali like she was the reason George wanted to go away. Ali put her head down and kept hearing those words that Grandma Agnes said, “It was the day Ali was born.”

Suddenly Caroline said very loudly and with a hint of exasperation “Merry Christmas, everyone!” Caroline’s family looked at each other and quickly stopped asking about George. Ali noticed how her relatives quieted down, and began concentrating on eating instead of talking. After dinner, everyone moved into the living room to find a comfortable place to sit and open Christmas presents. Ali unwrapped her gifts and smiled at everyone, and gave each relative a hug and said thank you, but all she could think about was something about her father leaving when she was born.

That night when Ali went to bed, she held Smokey Bear extra close while looking out her tiny bedroom window at a couple of stars she could see. Her thoughts were jumbled with listening for Santa and wondering where was “New York City”? During the day Ali was so busy playing that she did not think about such things as why she went to boarding school during the week; why her father was never at home; why her mother sometimes seemed sad. But late at night as Ali lay in her bed, she thought about these things. Thank goodness Smokey was there to hold onto.

“Rhymes have I,” Ali sang slowly as she became drowsier. She had visions of her father’s picture under the Christmas tree all jumbled together with Smokey Bear saying “Only You Can Prevent Forest Fires”, and Reynolds’ head looking down at her as she played in the river, and Santa and Rudolph and all the other reindeer flying though the night sky above River Street.

Ali sleepily and softly mumbled her usual prayer, made all the more special because it was Christmas Eve:

*“I wish I may, I wish I might,
have the wish, I wish tonight:
God, please bring Mother, Daddy, Reynolds
and I together, where we could all live in
the same place, all week long.*

And with that wish, Ali’s eyes closed in sleep and Smokey silently tumbled from

Ali's hand to the floor.

* * * * *

5: “Chicken Heads and Walnut Shells”

“Kids, time to go to Grandma Nettie's. I'm sure she'll have some Christmas surprises for you,” said Ali's mother. Ali loved Grandma Nettie very much; she was so different from Grandma Agnes. She didn't ignore you. She talked to you. She had a few bony, dried-up heads of dead chickens in her backyard which was a little scary, but she also had hutches with little rabbits for Ali to pet. Grandma Nettie usually had a jigsaw puzzle with many tiny pieces scattered on her card table in the living room and the smell of hot coffee and freshly baked bread always filled her little house on Ranch Street.

When Caroline drove up the long driveway to Grandma Nettie's little house, Grandma Nettie was pushing open the screen door to her cluttered, dusty, wooden porch where she would sometimes sit in her rocking chair at the end of a long day. She was wearing a brightly printed housedress without any rips. Most of her housedresses had little rips, especially under the arms, because of the work she did with her chickens and rabbits in the backyard. Her gray hair was swept up in a bun the way she always wore it, with just a little wisp of untamed hair falling on her neck. “Welcome youngsters”, she said as she hugged each one with her big, strong arms as they stepped out of the car.

“Come on in, Caroline----coffee's on and presents are waiting to be opened”.

Reynolds whispered in Ali's ear, “Bet you'll get a dead chicken head for your Christmas present.”

“Bet you'll get two”, retorted Ali. They took off running for the back yard to see the rabbits, and whatever else they could find in Grandma Nettie's untamed jungle of walnut trees, rabbit hutches, and chicken pens . It was smelly back there, but fun. Ali went to the rabbit hutch right away, carefully opening the little wire door to pet Old Henrietta, her favorite rabbit. She could hear her mother and Grandma talking because the kitchen window was open. Sometimes it was interesting to listen to grown-ups (and sometimes, like when they were telling you to go to bed, not so interesting).

Grandma Nettie took Caroline's arm and asked with a warm smile, “Have you heard

from your errant husband lately”? They sat down at the kitchen table and had a cup of coffee.

“Sure did. He called early this morning to wish us all a Merry Christmas on the telephone. Couldn’t talk too long because of his concern about long-distance charges, but it was nice to hear from him, especially being Christmas and all. I miss him so much,” said Caroline with a sigh.

“That boy of mine; he can’t think of anything except singing right now. He’ll get his fill of the big city and show business and come back where he belongs one day.”

“I suppose,” said Caroline, not sure of what the future would be like.

“So are you still pounding that comptometer at the Chevrolet plant?” inquired Nellie as she gave Caroline a cup of coffee.

“Yep, still working in the office to keep a roof over our heads. I pick up the kids every week end. They have so much energy. It’s hard for one person to take care of everything. I hate boarding the kids out, but I’m so tired in the evening when I get home from work-----it’s the best I can do right now,” responded Caroline with a guilty shrug.

“Honey, I know you do your best. I’m not judging you. Wish I could look after the kids for you, but I’m just too darn old and creaky. It’s all I can do to sell the eggs and walnuts I’ve got here on this little ranch of mine. Sure beats living in Naperville during those long winters when I was a kid.” Grandma Nettie was thinking about her own childhood, so many years ago.

“Although I do miss Mamma and Papa and all the others, I sure don’t miss all that snow! A fine howdy do, you and I missing everyone and moping around on Christmas Day,” Nellie said as she grabbed Caroline and hugged her once again.

“Where are those children?”----get in here kids and open your presents!” said Grandma Nettie with her booming voice out the kitchen window.

Ali and Reynolds came running from the backyard where Reynolds was searching for a few dried-up chicken heads which could sometimes be found near the old tree stump where their Grandma cut off the head of a chicken from time to time for dinner; most of Grandma’s chickens were for laying eggs and selling to locals. The chicken heads were mixed in with the walnuts that fell from the trees. The kids would stomp around and make crunchy sounds. Reynolds was trying to find a chicken head to toss at

Ali and make her scream.

“Ali was listening to you talk from the window,” reported Reynolds right away when he came in the house.

“Don’t be a tattletale young man,” responded his mother. “Wash your hands, both of you. Time for a couple more Christmas presents.”

Ali looked up at her mother.

“What is it, Ali?”

“Are Reynolds and I like horses?”

“What on earth are you talking about, Ali?”

“On television, the cowboys board their horses in the stables.”

“She must have heard our conversation a little while ago when you said you hated boarding the kids out,” said Grandma Nettie with a little laugh.

“No, Ali. You are not like horses! Now go wash up, OK?” said Ali’s mother.

The kids rushed to the kitchen sink to wash up. Turning to Nellie, Caroline said, “that child, I think she watches way too many westerns on television!”

Despite Reynolds’ usual antics in the backyard, it was a magical Christmas evening-----a new carom board for Reynolds and a cowgirl hat for Ali. Grandma Nettie knew what Ali liked, unlike Ali’s Grandma Agnes who kept giving her dolls and handmade handkerchiefs; Grandma Nettie knew that Ali was a wild west girl who liked to climb trees, look for crawdads in the river and, of course, shoot at bad men. After dinner, the television was turned on, and everyone watched an old movie about a mean old man named Scrooge who did not like Christmas.

“How could anyone not like Christmas?” Ali asked Grandma Nettie as she yawned. Her Grandma just reached out and pulled her up on her lap and Ali drifted off to sleep.

* * * * *

6: “Returning Soda Pop Bottles”

When Ali woke up the next morning, she smiled and was happy to be at her real home, not Mrs. Amity’s. So many things to catch up on. She hurried to put on her new cowgirl hat that Grandma Nettie gave her, and went out to find her mother in the kitchen

making pancakes. “Sweetie, go wash your hands and brush your teeth, before your eat breakfast,” her mother told her. That never made sense to Ali who thought that doing such things before going to bed at night was enough. But Ali decided not to give her mother any trouble; she was just happy to be home. By the time Ali got back to the little kitchen nook after hand-washing and teeth-brushing duties, the pancakes were ready for her. “Honey, you eat your pancakes while I read this letter from your father, OK?” While Ali ate breakfast she watched her mother read the newest letter her father had written. When he wrote long letters to her mother, he would tell her all about the cities he was visiting and the shows he sang in and all about the fun he was having. At the end of the letter her would tell Caroline how much he missed her.

“Did Daddy say anything about me?” asked Ali hopefully.

“Let’s see. Yes, right over here in the margin, he said give Ali a big hug from me.” Her mother pointed to the side of the letter where Ali’s name was located.

“What’s a margin, mother?” asked Ali.

“It’s the little space on the side of Daddy’s letters, Honey”. A new word for Ali: m-a-r-g-i-n. A little space, little, like Ali.

Ali was growing up in the margins of her family’s life. She lived in another family’s house during the week and came home on the weekends to watch her mother mow the lawn and clean house and add up numbers on a piece of paper----the amount of the bills. “With your father away on the road, I just can’t seem to do it all,” Ali’s mother would mutter while looking over at Ali, as if asking for some kind of understanding. Ali wanted to help, but she was only 7 years old. Her mother would read the letters over and over and she would laugh a little and then suddenly wipe a tear off her cheek. Ali’s father was a good writer. When her mother finished the letters, she would set them in a small basket by the picture of Ali’s father, on top of the piano in the living room. Her mother finished the letter and was placing it by George’s photo when she yelled out from the living room, “Ali, after you put you dish in the sink, why don’t you go out and play? Go find your brother and see what he’s doing.” Outdoors was always better than indoors. Ali wiped the syrup from the pancakes off her mouth in a hurry, grabbed her cap gun and raced out the door to spend her weekend shooting at bad men and exploring the neighborhood.

After the screen door slammed, and her mother yelled, “Ali for the umpteenth time.

don't slam that door!", Ali took off running. She never was quite sure in what direction she would run. She simply decided as she went. Would it be the river? If her friend Jenny was out playing, she might stop and play with her. Would she venture three blocks away to Ventura Boulevard where all the shops were? She was told not to go there without

Reynolds, but Reynolds was nowhere to be seen, which was OK with Ali. When she was brought home from Mrs. Amity's house the other day, she noticed that a new house was being built down the block. That was something to check on. The best thing about a new home being built, besides the smell of the sawdust which Ali loved, were the empty Coke and 7-Up bottles that could be found and returned to the market for money to buy candy. The new house it was, Ali decided. She had her cap gun to shoot badmen that might be lurking in the new house. No workers were there because of the holidays. Good, thought Ali, no one would shoo her away. Most of the kids in the neighborhood were with their families and playing with their new toys. Maybe a lot of the bottles would be there from the last day the workers had been there.

Ali looked around and since the coast was clear, she ventured into the new house which just had a lot of wooden boards nailed together at all kinds of funny angles. There were lots of nails lying all over the ground in the sawdust. The sawdust smelled so good, so fresh. Ali smiled; bottles were still littered all over the place.

She gathered up as many bottles as she could, stuffing some in her jacket and even trying to shove a couple in the top of her oversized boots which made walking difficult. Next stop, the supermarket.

Walking up to Ventura Boulevard wasn't easy when your clothes are stuffed with bottles and your hands are gripping several more. Ali kind of clanked and stumbled as she made her way to the store and her hands were sticky with little bits of liquid still in the bottles. To the back of the store there was a man who worked behind a little half door that had a place to set bottles when they were returned.

"Well, young lady, looks like you need a little assistance there," said the man behind the half-door; the bottom was closed, but the top was open.

"Clank," one bottle fell and hit the floor, but didn't break.

"Here we go," the man said as he reached down and collected the bottles from Ali's hands.

“One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight,” they counted as they set them all in a row.

“That’s a lot of bottles for such a little girl,” the man said smiling down at Ali. Ali got a handful of change and was ecstatic. Money for candy, or maybe later she would buy some ice cream when Good Humor man drove through the neighborhood in the afternoon.

“Thank you,” said Ali as she walked away, clutching her shiny coins.

“You’re welcome,” the man said.

As Ali was walking out the front door of the store, engrossed with all her shiny coins, she heard a familiar voice, “Hey, what are you doing here? Mom’s going to be mad if she finds out you came here without me”. It was Reynolds.

“Hey, how much money did you get?” he said, suddenly sounding a little friendlier.

“Let’s go back into the store and buy something,” he suggested.

Ali’s first thought was to not share. She did all the hard work, but she also knew her mother would be mad at her if Reynolds told on her.

“Well I don’t have that much, but OK,” Ali replied to her brother. After spending all the money on a Hershey bar, breaking it in half to share, and eating it on the spot, Reynolds suggested they get some more bottles.

“I think I got all the bottles at the new house----there aren’t any more there,” said Ali.

“I know where we can get some more. Follow me,” said Reynolds with great assurance.

Reynolds led Ali to the back of the market where all the returned bottles were stacked in wooden crates behind a rickety, old chain link fence.

“We’ll dig a hole under the fence and take some of those bottles. They have a ton of bottles back here. Who’ll know if we take a few?” Reynolds said to Ali. Ali was a little shocked at the idea, but intrigued. It wasn’t as bad as stealing cattle, and having the sheriff come after you she thought. She knew it was wrong, but the idea of some more money sounded good. She and her brother started digging under the fence, all the while looking around for anyone that might see them. There was just enough space to reach under and and start pulling a few bottles from behind the fence.

“See I told you it would be a cinch,” said Reynolds smugly as if he had done this before.

“You take them back in there and I’ll be the lookout,” he said shoving Ali in the direction of the store. Once again, she stumbled up to the half door and the man who took the bottles.

“You back already, little girl?” asked the man, tilting his head to one side.

“Yes”, was all Ali could say, starting to feel a little uneasy about this latest batch of bottles she was returning. She got her money, but this time it wasn’t as much fun. Something was bothering her. Did the man know why her hands were so dirty? Was he going to follow her outside the store? As Ali rounded the corner of the store to the back where Reynolds was, she saw him dragging out even more bottles.

“Here, I’ve got some more bottles for you, Ali,” said Reynolds.

“I want to go home now”, said Ali guiltily.

“What a scaredy cat you are,” he replied. Just then the back door of the market leading to the stacks of bottles opened, and the man who gave out the money for the returned bottles came out.

“Hey, you kids-----what are you doing back here?”

Ali knew when to run and “get out of Dodge” as she heard the cowboys on the television say. She started running back home. Reynolds reluctantly left his stack of bottles and took off not far behind Ali. Ali could still hear the man yelling after them and knew she would never be able to take empty bottles back there again.

* * * * *

7: “Germans in the Back Yard”

Ali and Reynolds came running through the front door of their house. They stopped and listened for their mother. The sound of the lawn mower clicking away in the back yard could be heard. She was mowing the lawn.

“Don’t you tell her anything,” Reynolds said threateningly to his little sister. Ali was out of breath and just shook her head up and down in agreement with her brother’s demand. They both disappeared into their separate rooms.

Once in her room Ali started thinking about what to do. She wanted to hide the coins she received for the stolen bottles for two reasons. She didn't want Reynolds to find the money, and she also knew there was something bad about the money, the way she got it and all. She put it in one of the pockets of her bathrobe in her closet. Her clothes and hands were dirty from all the digging for the bottles, so she dusted off her clothes and went down the hall to wash her hands in the bathroom. She looked in the mirror and saw that her face was still a little flushed, but at least it was clean. She quietly inched up to Reynolds' door which was open a crack. He was calmly sitting on his bed looking through a "Boy's Life" magazine without a care in the world.

Ali decided to go see her mother in the back yard. Maybe she could help her a little. She remembered earlier when her mother was reading the letter from her father and how her mother told her how hard it was to do everything with him gone so much of the time.

"Hi," said Ali as she waved at her mother who was still pushing the old, noisy lawn mower around the back yard. Her mother gave a quick wave and continued cutting the grass. Ali surveyed their little yard. There really wasn't much there to mow, patches of brown grass with occasional clumps of green grass. Her mother planted a few flowers near the windows called "Germans" which was funny because her mother said her family were Germans and came to America from a country called Germany a long time ago. It was confusing sometimes which is why her mother would point to the globe in the living room and show Ali where different countries were located.

"Yes", her mother once told her, "here is where Grandpa came from. This is where the Germans live."

"Mother, can I water the Germans for you?" Ali piped up.

"What?"

"Can I water the Germans by the window?" Ali's mother stopped mowing, wiped her forehead with her bandana, and smiled at her daughter.

"Honey, those are called geraniums, not Germans---Germans are people from Germany, like Grandpa, and yes, you can water them for me." Ali turned on the hose and watered the geraniums. A new word to know. It seemed like everyday there was something new to learn about.

"So how come our last name is Spain---are we from Spain---the place Christopher

Columbus went to get money to come here to California?” Ali asked curiously. She knew these things from school and also from Uncle Mack who was always telling her stories about things that happened a long time ago.

By now, Ali’s mother was sitting on the stoop leading to the back door of the house and surveying her lawn mowing efforts while answering Ali’s questions.

“Christopher Columbus didn’t come to California, but you are right that he went to Spain to ask for money to sail to America. Your father’s last name of Spain might mean his family came from Spain, but we don’t really know, since that was so long ago.”

Ali thought about everything her mother told her.

Just then Reynolds who had been listening to his mother and Ali from his open window, yelled, “You’re so stupid, Ali. Watering Germans in the back yard. Give me a break!” He began laughing at Ali and taunting her.

“Enough, Reynolds,” said their mother “leave your sister alone”.

* * * * *

8: “Dick and Jane vs Alice in Wonderland”

What a wonderful week at home, except of course for Reynolds, Ali thought. Caroline had taken Ali and Reynolds to Griffith Park to ride the trains. Actually the trains didn’t go anywhere, but you could get on and off them and run all over the place. Ali and Reynolds had their picture taken with Santa at the Panorama City reindeer lot. They had also gone to Corriganville which was Ali’s absolute favorite place: cowboys, western streets, gunfights, riding horses, playing by the lake, going in the saloon for a root beer, running through the rocks on the hillside. It was all just like the westerns on television.

But it was Sunday, and getting close to the time they had to go back to the boarding homes where they lived during the week. It was always hard to get into the car on Sunday night and go back. Reynolds would often get quiet and moody on Sunday afternoon, and go to his room and shut the door. Ali would look at television, if any westerns were on, or through her two books that she was reading.

The school book was about a family. The kids were named Dick and Jane and Sally and there was a dog named Spot and a cat named Puff. The mother and father were

always close by, teaching Dick and Jane and Sally about everything. Ali enjoyed reading the book, but when she looked at the pictures, she thought how different their home was from Dick and Jane's. She'd look at the picture of the father smoking a pipe and sitting in his chair reading the newspaper in her book, and then look up at the picture of her father on top of the piano. She would love to have a real dog or cat, but her mother said that wasn't possible with her working and Ali's father gone most of the time, so Ali had to settle on her stuffed animals. Everybody in the pictures looked happy and always seemed to be nice to each other. Didn't anybody cry? Did Dick and Jane always get along? They all lived together, all the time, in one house. It sure looked nice in the book.

The other book Ali enjoyed reading was Alice in Wonderland (she especially liked the pictures). In some ways she thought she was like Alice. Alice had adventures and was by herself a lot. Sometimes Alice cried and was confused. It was more real than Dick and Jane to Ali, and it definitely looked like more fun than Dick and Jane's life.

"Honey, it's time to go back to Mrs. Amity's-----are you ready?-----do you have your books?" asked her mother.

"Yes, I think so," said Ali with a sigh.

"What are you thinking about?" inquired Ali's mother after she noticed Ali looking at the cover of her two books.

"I'm thinking that it was nice that Dick and Jane and Sally lived at home all the time-----but it seems like Alice had more fun than Dick and Jane. I think I'd rather be Alice", said Ali.

* * * * *

9: "A Place called New York City"

Spring was in the air, and all attention was now focused on the coming of Easter. Each day Ali used her pastel-colored crayons to draw pictures of flowers, bunnies, or little yellow chicks for her mother. She would give them to her on Friday night when her mother came to pick her up. She was looking forward to hunting for Easter eggs in their backyard and the fun of being home for a whole week again.

Ali stood in the driveway of Mrs. Amity's house, waiting for her mother. "HONK,

HONK, HONK,” the familiar car horn sounded. Her mother was there to pick her up. Reynolds was in the back seat reading a comic book and ignoring her when she hopped into the front seat.

“Hi, Honey----- I have lots of exciting news to tell both you kids about!” said her mother right away. Ali looked back at Reynolds who shrugged his shoulders and shook his head from side indicating he didn’t know what the news would be.

“Mother, I have some drawings for you,” Ali said as she held up her folder of her Easter artwork.

“Sweetie, that’s wonderful. I’ll look at all of them as soon as we get home. OK?”

The drive home to River Street took about 10 minutes and Ali’s mother talked excitedly the whole time.

“I’ve been talking to your father each evening this week on the phone. He said it’s time that we all live in one place, together.”

That got Reynolds’ attention. Ali wasn’t sure about where that “one place” would be, but her heart began beating faster. Maybe her nightly prayer about her family living together, all in one place, all week long was coming true!

“As you both know your father in singing in a show in New York City----- he thinks the show will go on for a long time. He wants us to sell our house and go live with him. Won’t that be wonderful?”

Both Ali and Reynolds were listening to every word their mother said.

“New York City!” the kids said excitedly, almost at the same time.

“Remember, I showed you where it is on the globe? It’s a very big city a long way from the Valley where they have tall buildings to live in and big parks to play in. Best of all, we’d all be together,” replied their mother.

“Will anyone else be going with us?” asked Ali, thinking especially of her Grandma Nettie and Uncle Dan.

“Oh, no. They would never leave California,” said Ali’s mother, shaking her head from side to side.

“So, what do you two think?”

Ali’s mind wondered as she thought happily about them all being together, wherever that might be. She could only remember a few times when her father had been at home.

Once, he had sung a song on the radio and won some things including a television set. Someone came to their house and took a lot of pictures of them all together. One of the pictures was of her family at the breakfast table in their little kitchen. They pretended to eat their cereal and drink their juice and were told to smile all the time. It was like the pictures in the Dick and Jane book. Everybody was together and smiling. It felt kind of funny. Ali was the only one who turned around to look at the man taking the pictures. It seemed odd to have someone take a picture of you while you ate your breakfast. It was the only picture they had of all of them together.

“Ali, Reynolds wants to go, how about you? What are you thinking about?”

“I’m thinking it would be ----exciting----but a little sad, too---to leave Grandma Nettie and Uncle Dan --- can I take Smokey the Bear and my cap gun with me?” Ali asked looking up at her mother.

“Smokey is fine, but we’re leaving all cap guns, bows and arrows and slingshots at home, Ali. You don’t need any guns in New York City. They have lots of policemen, and very few wild Indians.”

* * * * *

10: “Grandma Agnes’ Warning”

By summer, Ali’s mother had sold the house on River Street. One weekend when Ali came home, almost all the furniture was gone; it had been sold too. They still had their little table in the kitchen, and the stove, and their beds, but almost everything else was gone. Things sure looked different to Ali. It was a little scary to think of going someplace so far away, but as long as her mother was there, she knew it would be all right.

“Ali, answer the door. It might be some people answering the ad for the garage sale,” yelled her mother from the kitchen.

Ali let the people in and they began pointing to a few of the small things that were still left: a set of encyclopedias, some dishes, little figurines, a few pictures on the wall. One lady walked into the kitchen and picked up a dish and ask Ali’s mother, “How much?” Then the lady reached over to Smokey Bear that Ali had left on the table and again asked, “How much?”

“NOOOOOOO, not Smokey” shrieked Ali.

The lady looked down at Ali like she was a bad-tempered child.

“Smokey is not for sale,” said her mother as she reached over and handed Smokey back to Ali.

“Ali, take Smokey and go out and play now.”

Boy, that was close frowned Ali as she went running out the back door with Smokey in tow.

That evening Grandma Agnes came over to the house. She walked in and immediately started telling Ali’s mother how crazy it was to go to New York City.

“I’ll never understand how you can just leave California to go to that awful, dangerous big city with your children,” was the first thing out of her mouth. Ali was sitting at the table and listening to her grandmother and mother talking as she ate her bowl of Rice Crispies and drank her glass of milk with Br’r Rabbit molasses in it.

“You’ll live in some awful apartment that has bugs, I’m sure. What happens if the show George is in closes? Everything is covered in concrete. They don’t have grass and trees there. No place to go on picnics like Griffith Park. People are always shooting each other and hanging all their laundry out the windows. I’ve also read that there are baby alligators that come right up out of the toilets there. I know, I used to go to Chicago when I was a young girl. Cities are awful,” lectured Grandma Agnes while Ali’s mother was packing boxes.

“Look Mom, stop saying all those things. First of all, you’ve never been to New York City. Second of all, I want my family to all live together. The children need to have a father and I need to have my husband. If it’s New York City, or Timbuktu, I am taking the children and going to be with him. Bugs or not. Grass or not. Laundry hanging out of windows or not. George and I have been away from each other far too long.”

“You’ll miss the California sunshine when all the snow starts falling in New York. I never thought you’d leave me all alone!” exclaimed Grandma Agnes.

“Really, Mother. You won’t be alone. Dan is here. Your brother and sister live nearby. And yes, I’ll miss California, but there are larger issues. I’m trying to raise my family now and we are all living in different places. George is in New York. Ali is at Mrs. Amity’s. Reynolds is at Mrs. Packard’s. I’m working all the time and only come

home long enough to eat and fall asleep and get up in the morning to go back to work----

“No one ever said it was easy,” interrupted Grandma Agnes again. “Why doesn’t George go back to work at Lockheed? He had a good job there.”

“You know he always dreamed of singing and being in shows. It’s something he had to do----”

“Yes, the day Ali was born,” Grandma Agnes said pointedly.

Ali’s mother looked at Ali who was listening to both of them.

“You don’t need to keep saying that mother!” fumed Caroline.

Ali’s mother told her it was time to brush her teeth and go to bed, so Ali went to the hallway, but kept listening even though she knew that was bad manners to listen to other people while they were still talking in the other room.

“Caroline, I want the best for you. You know I do. But, I’m going to miss you. Who’ll go to the movies with me now? You’ll be so far away”.

Caroline reminded her mother that there was such a thing writing letters and using telephones to stay in touch.

“My stomach is on the bum,” announced Grandma Agnes as she suddenly grabbed her purse and headed for the door. “You’ll see what that New York City is like. You’ll see!” she declared as she left the house slamming the door behind her.

Ali emerged from the hallway and walked to where her mother was sitting on the floor still trying to pack a few things.

“Your Grandma Agnes just doesn’t want us to go,” said Ali’s mother as she looked at Ali and got up from the floor.

“I think that is enough packing for tonight. “

As Ali and her mother went to the living room, Ali noticed that the globe was still there.

“Look mother----here’s New York City,” she said as she pointed to a place on the globe that her mother had shown her awhile back.

“Do they really have bugs there, and laundry hanging out the windows, and alligators----?” asked Ali.

“Oh, I’m sure they have a few bugs, just like we have here in the Valley, Honey. And as far as laundry hanging out the windows, does that really matter? We’ll be with

your father. That is the important thing to remember. Look, Ali, Reynolds is staying over at his friend Russell's house tonight. Let's watch a little television and have some popcorn and just have a good time, you and me. OK?"

"OK!" replied Ali enthusiastically.

* * * * *

11: "Ali and Reynolds Get Their Wings"

The magical day of flying to New York City had arrived. All the goodbyes had been made to relatives with an occasional hug now and again. Even Grandma Agnes was nice, and gave Ali and Reynolds a couple dollars to spend on their trip to New York. Uncle Dan held Ali up in the air and pretended to fly her around the ceiling of the empty house on River Street one last time, and kidded her about the alligators she should look out for when she got to New York. Grandma Nettie was happy for Caroline and kept saying that George needed his family near him in order to keep his feet on the ground and his head out of the clouds. Ali wasn't sure what she meant, but it sounded like a good thing---- keeping your feet on the ground. Uncle Mack told her to remember that she'd always be "San Fernando Ali" to him and not to forget him. Ali assured him, she would not forget him.

Being on an airplane was the most amazing thing Ali thought. They were far up in the clouds looking out the little windows at patches of brown and green way down below on the ground. You couldn't even see houses or anything from that high up in the air. The roar and rumble of the propellers was very exciting. The lady who walked up and down the aisles gave them some food to eat and miniature airline wings for Ali and Reynolds to put on their shirts, just like the wings she had on her jacket. Ali's heart pounded from excitement. Riding in an airplane. Going to a new place to live. Seeing her father. It had been such a long time since she had seen him. She sat in her seat thinking about her father. Although he was not as tall as Uncle Dan, her father was tall. Her mother always said he was so handsome with his dark hair, his wonderful smile, and his blue eyes. He looked just like a movie star, her mother would say. Ali didn't look like either her mother or father she thought. She and Reynolds had blond hair, (but they did have blue eyes like

her Daddy.) So many things to think about while flying in an airplane.

Every now and then the man who flew the plane would tell them they were approaching a certain place or that they were flying over a lake or something else interesting. Boy, was it a long time on the airplane. New York was certainly a long way from the Valley. Her mother and Reynolds played cards a lot of the time, while Ali looked at her favorite book, *Alice in Wonderland*. She always liked the part at the beginning where Alice fell down a rabbit hole and began her adventures with all kinds of strange animals and people in a very curious place.

When they landed at the airport and retrieved their luggage, the family climbed in a yellow car called a taxi and drove a long way to their new home.

“Wow, look at all the tall buildings!” Reynolds exclaimed. Reynolds who hardly ever seemed impressed with anything, was amazed at all the things he was seeing from the taxi cab. Their mother kept pointing at different sights, and Ali and her brother kept turning their heads from side to side to take it all in. They finally were traveling down the streets of the city.

“Well, kids, this is Manhattan,” said the taxi driver as he looked at the three of them seated in the back of his taxi through his rearview mirror.

“I thought we were going to New York City mother,” Ali piped up.

“Manhattan is part of New York City. It is a very big city. See here in the travel guide book that your father sent us, it says: “New York City is made of of five boroughs: Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, the Bronx, and Staten Island.” Ali had never heard of any of those places. the only thing that sounded familiar was “Queens” like the Queen of Hearts in her Alice book.

“Where’s Daddy?” Ali asked her mother.

“He’s at a hotel where we will meet him in just a little while, Honey. The first one who sees the sign for the Hotel Preston gets a quarter”, said Ali’s mother.

“We’ll stay there for a little while until our apartment is ready for us in October,” added Caroline. She kept looking out the window at everything as they drove through the bustling streets. She, too, like her mother had traveled to Chicago when she was young and had grown up in Hollywood, but she had never seen quite so big a city as New York. They all huddled together in the back seat, each of them wondering what was in store for

them.

“I can hardly wait to see your father,” said Caroline.

“I want to go to the Statue of Liberty,” said Reynolds

“I want to see Daddy, too,” said Ali who was holding tightly on her mother’s arm with Smokey Bear crunched in between them somewhere.

“I see it!” yelled Reynolds. “The Hotel Preston is on the corner over there. I win,” he said triumphantly. Ali didn’t care. She yelled, “and there’s Daddy over there----look mother, there’s Daddy waving at us.” George quickly ran down the steps of the hotel toward his family.

* * * * *

12: “First Look at The Big Apple”

“Hi, Sweetheart. Thought you’d never get here,” said George to his wife Caroline, all the while leaning down to hug both Ali and Reynolds.

“Good to see you guys,” he said-----flashing a smile at his family.

“Don’t expect too much at this place. The Hotel Preston is a dump, but it’ll be OK for a week until Madame Fifi vacates her apartment at the Osgood.”

“What’s a dump, Daddy?” Ali asked as she walked up the steps holding both her mother and father’s hands.

“This place,” her father told her as he laughed and swung her up to the next step.

“Well, Sweetheart,” George said to his wife Caroline “this is Broadway!” He hugged her around the waist and swept his hand toward the big street in front of them filled with dozens of cars and taxi’s and buses traveling in all directions.

“It isn’t the glamorous part with all the theaters, but it’s Broadway. Look, over there, that’s Columbus Circle,” said George as he pointed to a statue in the middle of the street just a couple blocks away. George leaned down to Ali and said, “What do you think, Pumpkin?” Pumpkin was his special name for Ali. Ali just gave him a hug around the waist and smiled at him. Caroline, George and Ali looked around for Reynolds who had already run into the hotel lobby and was looking at the magazine and candy counter.

“Mom, can I have that quarter I just won?” he asked when everyone came up behind

him.

“Whoa partner,” said his father. “Let’s get settled in first and then start taking a look around.” Reynolds shrugged. He was happy to see his father, but felt a little awkward with him. It was so long since he had seen him. Ali was a kid and could hold his hand, but he was 11 years old and holding your parent’s hand was not anything he wanted to do anymore. He could hardly wait to get out and see everything.

“Let’s go up to the room and check everything out. It’s not much, but it will do. A lot of the show people stay here to save money. It’s close to Central Park and not too far away from the theaters,” explained George. There was an elevator and a staircase, but since they were on the 5th floor, they all took the elevator.

Once they got to the room, George started talking excitedly about New York City.

“I love this place! There’s something for everyone here. Incredible things to see and do. Get comfortable. Here’s a bag of apples and a few snacks I picked up at the little store on the corner, if you’re hungry. I have a terrific map here for you Caroline. This city is easy to get around in. Just learn which way the streets are numbered and then learn which avenues cross them. You’ll get the hang of it right away,” enthused George.

Reynolds quickly sat on the old chair by the window that looked toward Central Park, just a block away. Ali sat next to her mother on one of the two beds in the room. Kind of lumpy thought Ali, bouncing a little on the bed, as she sat and looked around the room. A dresser. A small table. A hot plate that her father used to heat food. The drapes were kind of an ugly purple. It was very hot in the room, and the sounds of traffic came all the way up through their window. It smelled very different than their house in the Valley.

“A little musty in here,” said her mother.

“Yep, kind of musty,” agreed her father, wrinkling his nose and sniffing a little.

“OK, youngsters, before we take a quick tour of the neighborhood, a few precautions. Always use the Buddy System, even if you’re just going down to the lobby or to the bathroom down the hall. This isn’t the greatest hotel in the city, but it’ll do for a couple of weeks. Did you hear me Reynolds?” George said pointedly to his son.

Reynolds was looking out the window, but looked back at his father and shook his head affirmatively.

“Yeah, Dad, the Buddy System” repeated Reynolds.

“Mostly we’ll be together, but if somehow we get split up, you need to look out for your sister. Remember, you’re the oldest and she’s just 8 years old . Do you understand? This is important son.”

“I understand, Dad. Can’t we go outside and see some stuff?” urged Reynolds.

“Hang on son.”

“Ali, do you know what the Buddy System is?” George asked his daughter.

“Stay together,” Ali said, adding “and don’t go anywhere alone.”

“That’s my little Pumpkin”.

“Let’s go up to the roof and take a look at this wonderful city. It’s a good place to show you where things are located. OK?”.

Caroline smiled at her husband. He was always so detailed. It was good to hear the sound of his voice and see him with his children.

“Let’s go to the roof with your father,” said Caroline as she grabbed the bag of apples and handed one to each of the kids.

“You know, some of the show folks call this city ‘The Big Apple’---if you can make a go of it here, you’ve got it made,” said George to Caroline.

“Honey, just being here with you, I’ve got it made,” said Caroline as she hugged George again and scooted the kids out the door.

From the roof of the Hotel Preston you could see quite a distance.

“See Ali, over there, Columbus Circle”, said her father.

“Wow, what a huge park,” Reynolds said in amazement.

“Central Park-----the biggest one in Manhattan,” said George to his son.

“They have a skating rink, a place to play baseball, a zoo, a carousel, a bandstand. It’s amazing, something for everyone in the family”.

“Ali, look over there at the river,” Reynolds said to his sister, pointing at a silvery line of water in the distance, just barely visible in between the jumble of buildings all around.

“Yep, we are surrounded by water. You’re on an island, kids,” said their father.

“We’ll take a ride on the Staten Island ferry in a few days so you can see the island of Manhattan.”

“Like Catalina,” said Reynolds quickly who remembered a special trip there a couple years earlier in California.

Ali and Reynolds were scurrying all over the roof which was covered with gravel. It had a big sign that said “Hotel Preston” sitting on top of the roof.

“At night it is magical,” said George, sweeping his hand in front of him as if he was on a stage. “Lights in every direction. You’ll love it Caroline.” His wife smiled and listened to everything George was telling them.

“Careful kids, don’t lean over the edge there,” warned their mother.

“There’s a drugstore, and funny thing, it’s name is The Drug Store--- just a couple of blocks from here that has just about every item you can think of----toothpaste, paperbacks, a soda fountain, cigarettes, aspirin, socks, candy----everything. Just downstairs from the hotel there is a little food store. No supermarkets like in California around here, but you’ll get the hang of it,” George continued telling his family.

“Well, let’s get out our map and take a little tour of the neighborhood,” said George, taking Ali by the hand as Reynolds disappeared through the door that led to the stairs off the roof. Reynolds was always in a hurry.

George and Caroline and the kids walked rapidly with the crowds. Caroline and her children were wide-eyed with every sight. The huge intersections. All the cars. The hundreds of people everywhere. Ali never saw so many people.

“Why is everyone walking so fast, Daddy? Why are there so many people here?” Ali asked her father.

“Everyone is in a hurry. To go to work. To come home. To see a show. To eat. To live. That’s New York. It’s a big city and lots of people live and work here,” he responded. “Look over there. Just the other side of Columbus Circle. They’ve torn down a lot of old buildings. A brand new building will go up in place of the old ones. I think it’ll be a convention center. Always tearing down and building up around here. Out with the old, in with the new.”

A bus pulled away from the curb. Ali thought it smelled bad. Reynolds kept running up ahead, but Ali was content to hold onto her father’s hand.

“Not so fast Reynolds, wait for us right there,” his father would sometimes yell. Reynolds was enjoying the rapid pace of everything around him. His head was spinning

from the excitement of the city.

Along the way George pointed out The Drug Store where you could get everything (Ali remembered especially the part about candy), and then got to a street he called 57th Street.

“OK, we just came down Broadway and past Columbus Circle and The Drug Store. Now were going down 57th Street. This is the street our apartment is on----want to see it?”

“Yes,” said everyone in unison.

When they walked about a block George, pointed to a tall, old brownstone building on the corner.

“This is it. The Osgood Apartments,” said George. They all stood and looked way up. “We’ll be on the 7th floor-----we’ll take a better look tomorrow. And over there is Carnegie Hall where they play beautiful music and hold nightly concerts. And kids, just a few more blocks to your school from here. Everybody game to walk that far?” said George who was a wonderful tour guide and was clearly enjoying showing his family the sights of New York City. Even though they were tired from the long trip, it was so exciting that everyone unanimously decided to see more.

“OK, we’ll check out P.S. 69 and then grab a huge special deli sandwich and maybe a piece of delicious New

York cheesecake at my favorite delicatessen. I go there after the show most evenings.”

Ali thought P.S. 69 was an odd name for a school. Not really a name, but just two letters and a number. And what’s a delicatessen? Someplace that made sandwiches according to her father. That sounded good, but she wasn’t too interested in eating a cake made out of cheese. Ugh.

George looked at Caroline and asked if she was up to seeing a little more.

“I’ve waited so long for this. Absolutely.”

When they got to 54th Street, they turned and walked a short distance. “There it is kids, P.S. 69. You’re new school,” said George.

“Not really very new is it Dad?” said Reynolds looking up at a massive, old reddish-colored building that sure didn’t look anything like Hazeltine Elementary School in the

Valley.

“I’ll bet this place is a hundred years old. Looks more like a prison,” said Reynolds shaking his head from side to side while standing with his hands in his pockets.

“I think you’re right, son. Look up there at the top of the building. I think it has a date on it. Yep, 1890. Pretty old, but not quite a 100 years old. I’ve already registered you and Ali. You’ll start next Monday. Excited?” he asked his kids.

“Daddy, I’m, excited, but I’m really hungry too. Can we get our sandwich at that place now,” said Ali whose stomach was making little noises.

“Absolutely, Pumpkin. A piled-high New York delicatessen sandwich coming up.”

* * * * *

13: “Father and Son to the Theater/Mother and Daughter to the Park”

It was very hard to sleep that first night at the Hotel Preston. The overhead fan whirled around and around making noise, but didn’t really make things feel cooler. The lights flashed on the hotel sign outside their window after dark. The cars and taxis were making honking sounds and you could even hear people talking to each other, sometimes out in the hallway, and sometimes from way down below on the streets since their window was open to let air in. The elevator made a swooshing sound. Doors were being opened and closed just outside in the hallway. Sometimes George made a loud sound with his mouth, sputtering and then turning over. How nice to hear her father nearby thought Ali, even though he was kind of noisy when he was sleeping. Ali tried to go to sleep amidst all these new sounds. She firmly clutched Smokey Bear and snuggled close to her mother in one bed. Her father and Reynolds were in the other bed and everyone seemed to toss and turn about with just a sheet over them, since it was so hot in the room. As Ali’s eyes began closing, she thought how different it was here in New York compared to sleeping at Mrs. Amity’s house or her home on River Street. All you ever heard there, back in the Valley, were crickets chirping in the bushes in the backyard.

Ali woke up to the sounds of cars honking.

“OK, sleepyheads,” said her father “time to get a move on”. He had prepared coffee for he and Caroline and had some cereal for everyone and another bag of apples.

“I’m taking Reynolds to the theater today,” he said to Caroline. “I think it would be a good chance for me and Reynolds to bond a little. Father and son in the “Big Apple”. What do you think?” George asked Caroline.

“Sure, Sweetheart. Ali and I can take a look in a few stores and maybe go to the park for awhile”.

“Let’s synchronize watches, Honey,” said George as he looked down at his wristwatch. It’s 9:00AM. Let’s all rendezvous back here at the Preston no later than 2PM. You know I’ve got to get back to the theater by 3PM.”

Caroline checked her watch and remembered how punctual George was about everything.

Reynolds and his father walked seven blocks down Broadway and then turned onto 54th Street.

“Isn’t this the way to the school?” asked Reynolds.

“You are pretty sharp, son. Indeed it is. The theater I perform in is just a little bit further down from where the school is located.” They kept striding quickly down the streets, adeptly passing the slower people on the sidewalks and avoiding delivery guys and people running in and out of various hotels and stores and buildings along the way.

“Impressed?” George asked his son.

“What’s not to be impressed about. This is cool,” said Reynolds is a rare show of excitement.

“I missed you guys, you know. I hope you like it here.”

When they came to the street corners, Reynolds at first would stop, but took his cue from his father who quickly looked one way and then another and stepped right out into the street even though the light was red.

“Hey, kid, if you stop, everyone will know you’re a tourist. Just look fast and keep moving. Follow my lead and stay close,” said George while putting his hand on Reynolds’ shoulder.

Reynolds loved that. Not waiting for the green light. Just walking right out and there into the streets. It made him feel grown-up and kind of powerful.

“Cool,” said Reynolds again as he approached the next street and kept moving against the red light alongside his father.

“There it is, the Ziegfeld Theater,” said George proudly. “We’ll go in the stage door entrance.”

George introduced his son to some people backstage as he took Reynolds on a tour of the theater. “Good looking young man you have there George,” said one of the dancers. “Does he sing, George? Maybe he can join us,” said one of the ladies dressed in a costume for the show.

“She’s pretty, Dad,” said Reynolds smiling.

“Actually, I don’t know if he sings,” his father said to the scantily clad woman in the show. “Do you sing, son?”

“I never really tried Dad----maybe,” said Reynolds.

Reynolds walked toward the stage and looked out thinking how wonderful it must be to be applauded by people in the audience. George talked briefly to one of the stage managers about tonight’s show. Suddenly, a woman with red hair and dressed in a pretty costume, came up behind George and put her hands over George’s eyes, saying, “Guess who, darling?”

Reynolds looked over at his father from where he was standing and looked at the woman. Immediately, he did not like her. She called his father “darling”. Something was not right about that. George coughed and said, “Oh, hi young lady. Hey, I want you to meet my son----”

“Is Reynolds here?” she inquired.

Reynolds wondered how she knew his name.

“He sure is. Son, come over here, I want you to meet----”

“Hello, darling. What a handsome boy you are. Just like your Daddy,” she gushed, giving Reynolds a quick peck on the cheek. Reynolds was definitely not liking this strange woman.

“Hello,” said Reynolds flatly. He wondered if maybe everyone called each other darling in this place.

“Well, I just wanted to show Reynolds where his Dad hangs out and earns a living. My wife Caroline took our daughter Ali to see Central Park, I think. Bonding time for mother and daughter.”

“How sweet,” said the red-haired lady. Reynolds’ father seemed a little

uncomfortable and said he and Reynolds better move along.

“But, darling, you two handsome fellows just got here. Leaving so soon?” she said in a strange little girl voice.

”Just a quick look around back stage, and I’ll need to get him back to the hotel before Ali and her mother get home”.

Reynolds crossed his arms and seemed anxious to leave.

“Well, it was a pleasure to meet you son. Your father talks about you all the time. Bye-bye, boys,” she said as she left them standing on the stage.

“Who’s she?” Reynolds said, making a bit of a face.

“One of the women in the show. She has a beautiful voice,” said George as he watched the red-haired women disappear backstage.

“Seems kind of phony to me,” said Reynolds. “What’s her name?”

“Oh, her name is, ahh, her name is,-----Marsha,” George said with a little hesitation. That wasn’t like Dad to forget a name thought Reynolds.

Meanwhile, Ali and her mother had left the Hotel Preston and had entered Central Park near a big monument.

“This is the ‘Maine Gate’ to the park” said her mother while reading a travel guide book George had given her. “It says in the book that it is a memorial to the Battleship Maine which was blown up in 1898 and caused the United States to enter a war with Spain.”

Ali perked up when she heard her last name.

“Spain----- like us,” she smiled.

They continued down the walking path, past a lot of park benches partially covered with leaves. Ali was already starting to drop her mother’s hand in order to jump up on the benches and then jump down to run through the autumn leaves that were everywhere.

“Stay close,” said Caroline to her daughter.

Ali and her mother were looking at all the interesting people in the park as they walked along the pathway. There was an old man sitting on a bench feeding and talking to the pigeons.

“He’s talking to the birds, mother,” whispered Ali.

“He’s probably lonely, Ali, shhhhhh,” whispered her mother.

“Look at those people kissing over there, by the tree, Mother,” said Ali who had never seen people in the park doing that.

“Honey, this is New York, they do things differently here,” explained Caroline.

“Let’s sit down awhile so I can have a cigarette and look at the guide book for a moment,” said Ali’s mother as she plopped herself down, opened her purse, and lit up a cigarette.

“I’ll be right here on the rock, OK ?” Ali started climbing up a large outcropping of rock near the path they were on.

“OK, just stay where I can see you”.

The rocks reminded her of the westerns on television. She scrambled to the top and surveyed the park. She could see a playground with swings in the distance. She then slowly turned all the way around to view all the tall buildings surrounding the enormous park. She couldn’t quite see the Hotel Preston sign, but there was a huge sign on top of a building on the edge of the Park that said “Essex Hotel”.

A few minutes later, she heard her mother calling her name.

“Ali, Ali-----, let’s go.” Ali scrambled down the rocks and joined her right away.

“Let’s keep walking this way. We’ll get to 5th Avenue in a few minutes and look at some of the storefronts.”

Fifth Avenue was a very busy street. Buses, and taxis and cars, but best of all noticed Ali, there were horses there!

“Look, Mother, can I pet the horse?” begged Ali.

I don’t think so, Sweetie, he’s eating his food in that bag around his neck right now. Better not bother him. Maybe next time.”

Ali was disappointed, but obeyed her mother. She sure didn’t expect to find horses in New York City. That was a nice surprise. They walked and walked along 5th Avenue looking at all the stores along the way.

“This is so much fun, Honey. It’s called window shopping. You can look at everything, but you don’t have to go inside and buy anything,” explained Ali’s mother. What good is that thought Ali, to look but not buy anything? Oh, well, there wasn’t anything there that interested her, just a lot of women’s clothes and jewelry and things that her mother liked to look at. The only thing that she liked so far on 5th Avenue was

the horse with the feed bag and the toy store that they looked at earlier. Her mother promised her that when they had more time they could come back to both the horse and the toy store.

A little later, they stopped at a place that sold hamburgers and french fries right across from Central Park. On the menu was a hamburger that wore glasses. Ali read the menu, and it said: "Prexy's---"The Hamburger with a college education." That's funny, an educated hamburger, thought Ali. They ordered a couple of hamburgers with fries and a chocolate shake to share.

"Oh, my heavens, we're going to be late," said her mother suddenly. Her mother sounded like the White Rabbit in her favorite book.

"Hurry, Ali. Time to get back to the hotel!" Her mother grabbed the check from the counter and paid a lady at the cash register near the door.

Even though they rushed along the sidewalks as fast as possible, by the time they got back to the hotel, George and Reynolds had already returned. Ali's father had a strained expression on his face and as they opened the door. He lifted up his left arm and looked pointedly at his watch, all the while shaking his head unhappily.

"Not that look, George," said Caroline who was out of breath from hurrying back.

"We agreed on 2PM Caroline. Being on time is not one of your best suits. You know I have to get back to the theater." George retorted.

"OK, OK, I'm sorry. I guess we just got carried away looking at everything." Caroline tried to change the subject.

"I know you've got to get going, Honey," and turning to Reynolds she asked if he had a good time at the theater.

"Yeah, pretty much. Dad showed me around and I met "Marsha, darling," he said stressing the word "darling".

"Marsha, darling?" Caroline said looking at both George and Reynolds with a puzzled expression on her face.

"She's just one of the girls in the show. A little affected. You know, everyone is 'darling' in show business," said George as he gathered up a few things and started for the door.

"When do you think we can come see you at the theater, George? I'd love to see the

show,” said Caroline.

“Sweetie, it’s not a kids show. We’ll have to figure out a time when you can come as soon as we can make arrangements for the kids somehow. Got to go, Honey,” he said as he closed the door and hurried down the hallway.

* * * * *

14: “All Alone in New York City”

Monday had arrived, and it was time for Ali and Reynolds to start school at P.S. 69. It was also their mother’s first day back at work. She had transferred to a new job, and amazingly the office building was right across the street from the Osgood Apartments where they would be living in another few days. Caroline had taken the kids to The Drug Store on the weekend to pick up a few school supplies (notebooks and pencils).

Caroline, Ali, and Reynolds got up very quietly and scurried around like mice so as not to disturb George who was sound asleep. He sang in the evenings in his Broadway show and then stayed out late “unwinding” with the other show people -----getting something to eat, usually at the delicatessen. By the time he got back to the hotel, it was almost time for everyone else in the room to get up. Ali’s parents has discussed the different hours they would all be keeping, and said it would be a little tricky at first, but they’d get the hang of it.

Caroline quietly closed the door to the hotel room with George snoring soundly in the background.

“Good going kids, we didn’t wake your father.” They hurried to the elevator. Caroline was running a little late as usual, and anxiously looking at her watch.

“This is going to be close, my getting you two to school and then back to the office on time.” Caroline bit her lip slightly.

“Mom, I know the way. I’ll take care of Ali. You don’t need to take us,” said Reynolds in a very grown-up way. Caroline looked at him and thought about what he just said.

“I don’t know----”

“We can do it. Can’t we Ali?” he said to his little sister. Reynolds was kind of a pain

sometimes, but he did know how to find things. Ali remembered how she and Reynolds rode their bicycles all the way down Van Nuys

Boulevard in the Valley about five miles to go see Grandma Nettie a couple of years ago, much to the amazement of both Grandma Nettie and their mother.

Sure,” said Ali who was a little nervous, but who had always had an adventurous streak.

“OK, Reynolds, but straight to school and take care of your sister!” said Caroline with a few misgivings. Caroline hugged both her kids in front of the building where she was going to be working. Off went Ali and Reynolds, running down 57th Street.

“Here’s the prison,” said Reynolds as they arrived at school and went upstairs to the administration office. The lady in the office asked where their parents were.

“Dad’s at home sleeping and Mom dropped us off,” responded Reynolds. It was partly true anyway.

“Very unusual,” the lady muttered.

“Reynolds, you are in the 6th grade----Room 244. “Ali, you are in the 3th grade---Room 248. You’ve missed a week of school you know,” she said as she peered over her glasses at them.

“Well, we just got here from California,” said Reynolds nonchalantly.

“I have an uncle who lives in California,” the lady responded.

“We do, too,” responded Ali proudly. She was thinking of her Uncle Dan.

Two of the ladies in the office escorted Ali and Reynolds to their classes. “See ya squirt,” said Reynolds to his sister as they were led in two different directions.

“This is Alison Spain. She’s from California,” said the lady to Mrs. Goldie, her new 3th grade teacher in Room 248. The other students turned to look at Ali and laughed a little when they heard her name. Ali was a little embarrassed by their laughter.

“Where in California are you from?” asked Mrs. Goldie.

“The San Fernando Valley-----actually Sherman Oaks,” Ali said to be precise.

“You from Spain?” said one of the boys loudly with a smirk on his face.

“No, California,” answered Ali, not liking the smart aleck tone of the boy.

“And my name is Ali,” she quickly added, not wanting to be called Alison.

“Ali it is. Welcome to P.S. 69 and New York City, my dear,” said Mrs. Goldie who

also thanked the lady who brought Ali to the classroom.

“Ali, please take a seat over there near the window,” instructed Mrs. Goldie. Mrs. Goldie was very nice. She had a bit of an accent (a Brooklyn accent, Ali later learned) and had long, gray hair and wore red-rimmed glasses. She spent some time with Ali during the graham cracker and milk break and told her about all the things they would be doing in 3th grade. Ali wasn’t worried about the reading assignments, but she was worried about mathematics. That had never been her best subject. Reading she liked. Art she liked. Kickball she liked. But not math.

Ali looked around the snug little class. There were individual wooden desks with a hole in the upper right hand corner. You could lift the top of the desk and put your pencils and notebook inside. There were pictures of a bald man with a big smile and George Washington on the front wall. A large globe was in the corner along with a stand with an enormous dictionary. Old-fashioned looking radiators lined the wall near the windows that looked down into a rather shadowy, small playground area surrounded by other buildings. There was a large closet in the back where kids put their jackets and caps during the colder months.

But most interesting to Ali as she looked around her, were the kids. At Hazeltine Elementary School in the Valley, everyone pretty much looked and dressed alike. At P.S.69, most of the kids looked like Reynolds and Ali, but some of the kids looked different. There was a little boy that she later learned was from Japan; he wore a white shirt and tie and was proud that his father worked as a musician. There was a little Negro girl, Annie, who had had many tight little braids in her hair and who looked just as uncomfortable as Ali was wearing a dress. Ali never wore a dress, except at school. They made you wear a dress if you were a girl. How unfair she thought. A little girl named Miranda whose parents came to New York City from Cuba wore a bright red, patterned dress that her grandmother made for her. In contrast to Miranda’s dress, Ali wore a plain gray jumper dress with a white blouse.

Her mother said it was practical, since Ali could change blouses daily and wear the same jumper all week long.

When it was 3 O’clock, the bell rang and the kids rushed out of the class, everyone in a hurry to go somewhere. Ali met Reynolds on the staircase and they exchanged a few

comments about their first day.

“Kind of boring,” said Reynolds, adding, “I already know all the stuff they’re teaching.”

“I liked my teacher, Mrs. Goldie, and I met a girl named Annie and a girl named Miranda. They’re nice.”

“Hey, Ali, there’s a place called ‘Playland’ a couple blocks down the street. You want to go with me? Dad and I went there the other day. They sell magic tricks. There are pinball machines and shooting games. Do you have any money?”

“Mother wanted us to go straight home, remember Reynolds?”

“You’re never any fun.” Reynolds looked at Ali with disdain.

They walked back to Broadway with Ali doing her best to keep up with her brother who was walking rapidly a few paces ahead of her. She kept her eyes glued to him. She didn’t want to get lost on her first day! Reynolds whirled around suddenly at Broadway and gave Ali directions.

“Walk straight back on this street to 61st Street and you’ll be back at the Hotel Preston. I’m going to check out a few of the magic tricks at Playland. I’ll be back in just a little while.” Ali looked at him and then looked the other way in the direction of their hotel. Right at that moment she felt very much like Alice in her reading book. There she was in New York City, and all alone. She looked up at the street signs that said 54th and

Broadway. She turned on her heels looking across the street and saw a theater that had the letters CBS TELEVISION. Reynolds had disappeared almost instantly in the crowd of pedestrians.

“Who needs him? I can walk home,” Ali muttered with a mixture of anger at Reynolds and fear at the idea of walking home alone. She walked near the buildings and looked up at all the people hurrying this way and that. They didn’t even notice her. Every now and then someone would hurry around her and say, “Look out kid!” She felt almost invisible. When she got to the sign that said 57th Street, she looked up at the building where she knew her mother was working. Just another block and she’d be at The Drug Store which she recognized by now. She peered in the window and saw the lady at the cash register who helped them the other night. Better keep going and get back to the hotel she told herself. She crossed the big intersection near the park, across from the statue of

Christopher Columbus.

Two more blocks, and the Hotel Preston loomed up before her. When she got upstairs to their hotel room, she discovered that her father was not there; he must have left already for the theater. Ali went downstairs and sat in one of the big chairs in the lobby, but the man at the registration counter kept looking at her as if she shouldn't be there, so she went out and sat on the steps in front of the hotel.

There was a man sitting on the steps of the Hotel Preston, not far from Ali.

"Hi, little girl. What are you doing out here on this fine day. Why aren't you with your parents?"

"I'm waiting for my brother. My parents are working," said Ali.

"Well, where is this brother of yours?" the man asked.

"He's looking at some things. We just got here from California," Ali said innocently.

"California, huh?" he replied.

"Why don't you wait with me for awhile. My name is Uncle Bill. What's your name?" he asked.

"Ali," she responded. Ali thought he was nice. He talked to her and she didn't feel so alone. She walked over and sat next to him.

"You remind me of my little niece," said Uncle Bill. "She's pretty like you and has a little pony tail just like yours." Uncle Bill touched her head and tugged on her pony tail when he said that.

"So you have a book with you I see. Hmmmmmmmm. "Alice in Wonderland". Shall we read a little bit?" he asked Ali.

That sounded like a good thing thought Ali, since she loved to read.

"Here, sit on my knee and I'll read to you," said Uncle Bill tapping his shabby trousers on his right knee. Ali thought he smelled bad, but was embarrassed to get up once she sat on his knee and offered him her prized book to read out loud.

Uncle Bill started reading. He squeezed Ali around the waist and hugged her a little. He put his hand on her knee. Ali suddenly felt uncomfortable. She really didn't know "Uncle Bill" after all. She started to squirm a bit.

"Hey, who are you? Why are you touching my sister?" yelled Reynolds from the bottom of the hotel steps. Instantly, Uncle Bill put Ali and the book down and hurried

down the steps and toward the park without saying a word to Reynolds.

“Who was that man?” Reynolds asked Ali.

“He said his name was Uncle Bill,” responded Ali.

“Sounds like a phony name to me,” said Reynolds. “Don’t you know you shouldn’t talk to strangers?”

“Don’t you remember the Buddy System?” Ali retorted. “I wouldn’t have talked to him, if you-----”

“Aw, forget it, Ali,” interrupted Reynolds, knowing she was right. “Come on, let’s go up to the room and look out the window to see where that old guy is going.”

By the time they got upstairs and looked out their hotel room window, they could see that Uncle Bill was already walking into the park. He was headed down the leafy pathway, toward the playground.

* * * * *

15: “Little Apartment in the Big City”

Their father had been out on an errand and arrived home shortly after the “Uncle Bill” incident. They both got in trouble-----Reynolds for leaving Ali alone, and Ali for talking to a stranger.

“What was the first thing I told you two?” demanded their father. “The Buddy System!” he said loudly as he looked first at Reynolds and then at Ali. “We’re here one week, and now this,” he said shaking his head in disapproval.

“Come on both of you, let’s see if we can find this creep,” said their angry father. “Maybe it was a good thing,” he said turning to Ali. “It’s a lesson. Don’t ever let someone touch you like that, you understand?”

“Yes, Daddy” said Ali with her lip trembling and on the verge of tears.

“No tears, Pumpkin. I want you to be safe. Be aware of where you are and who is around you, understand?”

“Yes, Daddy.” Ali felt she had disappointed her father.

They all quickly left the hotel and hurried toward the park to find “Uncle Bill”.

“These creeps keep moving around wherever the kids are,” said their father, clearly upset.

They walked all around looking for the old man, but never found him.

When Caroline returned to the hotel, she was told the whole story.

“Are you OK, honey,” she quickly said to Ali.

“I’m fine mother,” she said while fidgeting in the chair by the table.

“And you, young man. What did I tell you this morning?” she fumed at her son.

“You told me to stay with Ali and go straight to school-----and we did,” replied Reynolds trying to wiggle out of his predicament.

“Don’t be smart with me, mister,” Caroline said to Reynolds.

“You let them walk alone to school on their first day?” George said to his wife.

“We were running late----”

“Running late? You’re always running late. You need to prepare ahead of time, especially with the kids, and----”

“Don’t tell me about raising the kids, George. You’re never home and are in no position----”

It went on like that. Neither George nor Caroline were listening to each other. Both were feeling guilty about what happened. Ali and Reynolds sat at the table listening to them bicker, and started thinking how different everything was from what they thought it would be. Ali imagined her family being together would be like the pictures in the Dick and Jane books, or the families on television where they all seemed to be smiling and having a good time. Reynolds didn’t like his father being unhappy with him. His father hadn’t been around for a long time and now he was always telling him what to do and getting mad at him. He got rid of that creepy, old “Uncle Bill” and rescued Ali, but no one seemed to remember that part.

October soon arrived and the family moved into the Osgood Apartments. It was much nicer than the Hotel Preston. There was an awning extending from the apartment entrance to the street. A man in a uniform opened the big front door for the adults, but if it was just Ali and Reynolds coming home from school, he didn’t bother. Just inside of the building, there were beautiful tiles and stone covering everything---the walls---the floor---the ceiling! There was also a second set of doors that opened to the most fantastic lobby Ali had ever seen, certainly a thousand times prettier than the one at the Hotel Preston. It looked like something in the movies. The colors were mostly red and gold, and

there were lots of angelic looking cherubs painted on the high ceilings. An enormous gold clock with Roman numerals hung in the center of the lobby.

“Which way do we go, Mother?” Ali asked when they first stepped into the lobby. Reynolds was with his father at the theater.

“Your father said to go to the left side and take the elevator to the 7th floor.”

“But there’s an elevator over on that side, too,” said Ali. Just then a man who had heard them talking looked down at Ali and said, “Oh, no, that’s my elevator, you can’t take my elevator little girl.” He laughed heartily, and then hurried out the front door of the lobby.

The lady at the front desk asked Ali’s mother if she knew the man who had just spoken to Ali.

“You mean the fellow with the gray curly hair who told us not to use his elevator? He was just joking with Ali,” said Caroline.

“Why that is Mr. Leonard Bernstein, the great musician and conductor.”

“You don’t say? I’ll have to tell my husband when I see him later,” said Caroline as she and Ali walked toward the elevator on the left side of the lobby.

“Mother can I use the stairs?” begged Ali “All the way to the 7th floor?” her mother said incredulously.

“I’ll bet I can beat you up there!” said Ali, ready for the challenge.

“Well, the elevator isn’t here yet. Go ahead. See if you can get some of that stored up energy used up before bedtime,” said her mother.

Ali took off up the stairs, holding onto the beautiful mahogany railing and jumping by leaps and bounds, skipping several steps at a time as she ascended the elegant staircase. First floor. Second Floor. Third Floor. Ali briefly looked down at the large leather chair on the ground floor where the elevator man sat in between rides. She was breathing hard, but pressed on. 4th Floor. 5th Floor. 6th Floor. Just as she reached the 7th floor, the elevator door opened and out came her mother.

“A tie!” said Ali, very proud of herself, but also very winded. Now it was time to find their apartment door: 7Q. There were doors everywhere. Ali once again thought of her favorite book, when Alice encountered a hallway full of doors. “There it is, Honey,” down that long hallway. This is your new home,” said Caroline to her daughter as she

turned the key and entered their apartment.

The apartment was a very different place to live than their house on River Street. It looked out over several buildings toward Central Park. Way in the distance of the enormous park you could see a castle. Ali decided that one day she and Reynolds would be explorers and walk all the way to the castle. In the living room, there was enough room for a sofa with a hideaway bed inside, a chair, a small television set and a small dining table by a little side window. There was also an upright piano (that Madame Fifi had left behind when she moved) with a record player sitting on top of it. Long reddish-colored drapes hung on each side of the big window that faced the park with a built-in radiator underneath the window to keep the apartment warm during the winter months. The floors were made of beautiful little squares of wood and had large rugs with swirling red, black and gold designs on them.

As Ali explored each room, she thought that they were all very small, but cozy. In the bedroom that she and Reynolds would be sharing, she immediately placed Smokey Bear on her bed. Reynolds eventually posted a note on his side of the room that said “No Trespassing” (targeted mainly at his little sister). The bathroom had tiny, white five-sided tiles on the floor and a bathtub that sat up off the floor and had claws like some strange animal. Ali carefully lifted the toilet seat to check for alligators several times, and the good news was that there weren’t any, at least not yet. And in the kitchen----Ali definitely felt like “the big Alice” in her book when standing in there. You could use the sink, open the oven door, and turn around and sit at a table without moving more than one step!

Their first night at the Osgood took one bad turn when Ali went to the kitchen to get a glass of milk before going to bed and switched on the light. Three big, black bugs crawled very quickly along the walls to their hiding place behind the warm stove. Ali shrieked. Her mother came running.

“Grandma Agnes was right about the bugs,” Ali said as she hurriedly left the kitchen and lost interest in getting any milk.

Everyone settled into their routine: school for the kids; working in the office across the street for Caroline; and singing in the show late at night for George. When Ali and Reynolds returned from school, they were to do their homework first, and then watch

television if they wanted to. After that they were allowed, on the Buddy

System, to go to the park or to The Drug Store where they were given a little money to buy a soda or candy bar.

The Drug Store, just around the corner, became a home away from home. As soon as they entered the store, they looked at the candy counter, then looked at their money and decided what was in their budget for the day. Sometimes it was a candy bar, and sometimes it was a shared soda at the fountain.

The lady at the cash register in front was very abrupt at first saying things like, “I haven’t got all day kids, make up your mind, is it a candy bar or a soda today?” But, after a few visits to the store, they noticed that she seemed a little friendlier. On one of their first visits to the lunch counter, back when they were living at the Hotel Preston, their mother had asked for coffee from the man who worked behind the fountain. She then asked for cream and sugar a short time later.

“Lady, if you want cream and sugar, ask for it right away! You guys talk funny,” said the man behind the counter to their mother.

“Really? Well, we’re from California,” responded Caroline in her usual, friendly manner.

“That explains everything,” the man said as she turned and walked away. Ali wasn’t sure what that meant, but thought it was odd that he thought that they talked funny. If anyone talked funny, it was most of the people she was meeting in New York City.

* * * * *

16: “A Hurricane Followed by a Walk in the Park”

“Bundle up everyone,” said George, “the news on the radio is that a major storm, a hurricane is headed this way.” Ali had noticed how the weather was changing. It was getting cooler, and throughout the park, beautiful leaves of red, and yellow, and gold were everywhere, falling on all the pathways and the grass. During the last couple of days, there was more wind than usual.

“Wear your slickers,” said Caroline to her children.

“If the storm gets real bad, they may even send you home from school early.”

“Yeah,” said Reynolds “hope it’s a really big hurricane”.

“If you do have to come home, come straight home and call me at work,” added their mother.

Well, the hurricane arrived in New York City and was unbelievable. It even had a name. It was called Hurricane Hazel. Kids were sent home from school and it was hard to walk in the wind and rain that poured down all over the city.

Caroline came home early, picked up the mail at the switchboard in the lobby and went upstairs to find the kids watching the hurricane out the living room window.

“Wow, you can hardly see through the window it is so rainy and windy,” said Reynolds. “You can’t even see the park out there.”

“Look mother, the windows are all blurry. Listen to the howling wind!” exclaimed Ali who was glad her mother was there with them.

“It’s a fierce one, that’s for sure. Coming down in buckets. Nevertheless, I want you both to start working on your homework now. I’ll get out of these wet clothes and start making some hot cocoa for all of us,” said their mother.

“With marshmallows?” asked Ali.

“With marshmallows” said he mother.

Caroline turned on the television, but the reception was particularly bad because of the hurricane. No matter how she twisted the rabbit ears, nothing came in. She turned on the radio, and sat down at the table with the mail and some hot cocoa. She opened the bills and set them to one side and then noticed a letter addressed to “George Spain” from someone named “Marsha O’Mara”. She quickly remembered her son referring to “Marsha, darling” a couple weeks ago and wondered about the contents of the letter. While the kids were working on their homework, she decided to open the letter even though it was addressed to George. After reading it, she started to cry which startled both Ali and Reynolds.

“What’s wrong, mother?” said Reynolds.

Caroline quickly put the letter out of sight and just said something about all the changes in her life recently made her emotional sometimes.

It was hard to sleep that night with the storm outside gusting around the corner of their apartment. Reynolds finally drifted off to sleep, but Ali’s eyes were still wide-open

when she heard her father shut the front door and walk past her room. She wanted to get up and give her father a hug, but knew it was long past her bedtime, so she stayed in her snug little bed and listened to her parents a few feet away in the living room.

“What a storm, Honey! I’m soaked to the bone. Do we have some hot coffee?” asked George.

“Maybe Marsha darling can make you some,” said Caroline coldly.

Ali could hear all this, but it made no sense to her that someone named Marsha should make her father coffee.

“What are you talking about?” George said.

“I opened this letter. I don’t think it requires a lot of imagination to figure out.” Ali’s mother gave George the letter and after a minute or two, George said, “I don’t know what to say, Caroline”.

“Maybe, we need to re-think a lot of things, George. Maybe you need to stay in a hotel somewhere tonight until we can talk about everything.”

Ali could hear her father’s footsteps as he left the apartment and shut the door. She was really confused. Why was her father going back out in that terrible storm? Why would he go back to a hotel? Why did her parents need to talk about everything? And what was everything? A piercing howl of wind rattled the small window in the bedroom. She flew out of bed and ran into the living room to where her mother had opened the hideaway sofa.

“What are you doing up, Ali? Still awake at this hour?” said her surprised mother.

“The wind is scaring me. Why did Daddy go back outside?”

“You can sleep with me tonight, Honey. Jump in bed and get to sleep. We’ll talk about everything tomorrow.” Her mother pulled the covers over her daughter, and held her close until they both finally drifted off to sleep.

The next morning Caroline explained to her children that their father was going to be away for awhile, until everything blew over.

“What is everything, mother?” asked Ali who was definitely confused.

“Everything is a lot of different things. Some are adult things you wouldn’t understand right now, Ali. Now hurry-----both of you. It looks pretty good outside this morning. Wear your galoshes and rain slickers just in case. I’ll see you when I get home

from work.” Reynolds just listened; he was bewildered as well.

Later that day, after school, Ali told Reynolds what she heard last night.

“Marsha darling, huh,” said Reynolds with a bit of a sneer on his face.

“She’s the phony lady who sings in the show with Dad,” said Reynolds.

“Dad likes Marsha darling,” added Reynolds.

“Come on let’s go down to the theater on the corner and see if Dad’s around---- maybe they’re rehearsing or something,” said Reynolds to his sister.

They walked toward the theater. Ali was still trying to figure out her parents’ conversation last night, and Reynolds was mad at his father.

“Why did he bring us all the way to New York?” said Reynolds, not so much to Ali but just out loud.

Ali didn’t know what to say. She just followed him. When they got to the stage door of the theater Reynolds asked if his father was there. “Why, no son,” I think he’s across the street at the restaurant getting a bite to eat.

The children crossed the street and looked through the window. Their father was sitting next to a redheaded woman who was crying and holding onto George’s hands.

“There’s Marsha darling,” said Reynolds in disgust. Ali wondered why this woman was crying. What was it about her father that made women cry? Ali wondered.

George and Marsha never saw them standing there.

“Let’s get out of here,” said Reynolds as he began running down the street with Ali tailing after him. Ali didn’t see him, but Reynolds was wiping away tears from his eyes too.

George moved back to the Hotel Preston and explained to both Ali and Reynolds that just because he and their mother were having problems, he still loved them. Reynolds was upset with his father and mostly avoided him, but Ali missed seeing him. She was just getting to know him and then he was gone again.

One day George took Ali to Central Park and they walked a long distance down a pathway that had statues of famous writers on each side. One of Ali’s favorite was a man sitting with his dog. She loved dogs. If she got up on her tiptoes and held on to the tail of the dog and the right shoe of the man sitting with a book in his lap, she could climb up on the statue.

“What are you doing up there with Sir Walter Scott?” asked her father. “Better get down or you might get arrested,” he joked.

While they walked, her father would hum, and sometimes sang songs from the show he was in, right out in the open with people all around.

“People are watching you Daddy,” said Ali sheepishly.

“That’s OK, Pumpkin. I’m a singer and this is New York. No one cares if you sing or stand on your head,” he said with a smile. Her father set Ali standing on a bench and then backed away and bowed.

“I know this is your favorite,” said Ali’s father. He then began to sing the entire song “Rhymes Have I” from his show, all the while making gestures like a person on the stage. He continued singing as they strolled along and finally finished, taking a bow. Several people sitting on the grass and benches close-by applauded.

“Thank you. Thank you very much” said George who was enjoying himself.

They walked back toward the playground where Ali shared her favorite climbing rocks with her father. She climbed up the rocks like a mountain goat and then scrambled down again while her father watched. Next, Ali took her father to the swings near the fence. At first her father pushed her for a while and then sat alongside her in the next swing.

“Honey, I’m sorry if things are confusing for you,” started her father in a serious tone. Your mother and I are not getting along too well, I’m sure you’ve noticed that. It’s not her fault. I guess it’s mine. New York is wonderful, but maybe not the best place for all of us. You know I’ve moved to a hotel, but I want you to know you can visit me. Just call me and I’ll be there”.

“OK Daddy.”

“I know Reynolds is upset with me. How about you Pumpkin?” asked her father.

“I love you Daddy,” was all Ali could think to say to him.

Her father reached down and picked up a small piece of rope from the playground pavement and started singing a song from his show “Kismet” in a loud voice. He sang about Fate playing a trick with a twine and whether it was good or ill, and something about honey on his tongue. Ali wasn’t at all sure what he was singing about, but loved listening to him and watching him pretend he was on a stage in front of an audience. On

the last note of his song, he held out his hand to Ali who took his and they began walking back to 59th Street toward the Osgood.

* * * * *

17: “No Trick or Treating Allowed”

So many changes in such a short time mused Ali as she trudged home from school along 7th Avenue. She never would have imagined what curious things were in store for her when she wished on the stars from her bedroom window in the Valley so long ago. Her family was together in New York City, but not really together in the way she had hoped. Her father was living in the Hotel Preston and always busy with his show. Her mother worked late into the evening across the street, and Reynolds spent his time with boys his own age that he had met in school or in the apartment building.

Ali walked the four blocks home from school by herself now. Her father told her to walk with purpose, like she knew where she was going. Mostly she ran, her ponytail bobbing behind her, as she threaded her way through the thicket of people moving along the sidewalks. She would always stop at the intersections if the light was red, unlike a lot of the pedestrians.

“Whoosh,” a gust of cold wind swept around Ali as she stood at the corner and waited for a red light to turn green near the Hotel Wellington.

“Move along, youngster,” some man yelled at her as she waited one second too long to start crossing the street.

“HONK, HONK, HONK,” a taxi cab driver blared his horn as she quickly stepped up on the curb on the other side of the street. Ali had learned how to move much faster in the city, but it seemed like you could never move fast enough for some people, especially taxi cab drivers!

Along the route home, she peered into the storefront windows and enjoyed looking at all the Halloween advertising for candy. It was already the end of October! It seemed like every store had a picture of a pumpkin, or a witch, or a ghost beckoning the people on the street to come in and spend some money on Halloween stuff. Ali didn’t have any money for candy, but that didn’t matter-----tonight was Halloween!

In California you could walk from house to house with your jack o'lantern or a brown shopping bag and get lots of candy, but Ali soon learned that Halloween in the Valley and New York City were not the same. As soon as it got dark, Ali and Reynolds dressed up as pirates and began knocking on doors at the Osgood. Mostly, no one opened their door, or if they did, it was quickly and with a chain in place, and then words from someone unseen behind the partially opened door that said "Go away children, you can't trick or treat here."

The one person that was nice to them on the 7th floor was the lady who once lived in their apartment---the lady that their father called Madame Fifi. Her real name was Lili, but her parents came from France and she owned a French poodle, so George called her Madame Fifi (but not to her face). She was in show business like George. She sang on stage and was an artist and had all kinds of pictures in her apartment of famous people she had worked with. "Oh, Enzo, he was so wonderful in South Pacific," she would say. Ali didn't know who any of them were, but she loved to listen to Madame Fifi. Ali also loved to visit her because of her French poodle named Babette. Sometimes Madame Fifi would come by and knock on their apartment door to see if Ali wanted to help her walk Babette. Ali always liked doing that.

Ali and Reynolds knocked on Madame Fifi's door. She opened the door with her poodle in her arms and invited them in. She had her hair in curlers and was wearing her robe and slippers, but she was happy to see them.

"Oh my, Trick or Treating time and me with no candy," she said looking around her tiny kitchen. She went to her purse and got them each a quarter.

"Go buy yourself something," she said. There was music playing loudly in the background. Madame Fifi called it opera music. Ali listened a little, but couldn't understand any of the words.

"Little ones, one day we shall go to Carnegie Hall and hear real music, not that junk they listen to nowadays. Shaking, Rattling, and Rolling, really. Has everyone lost their minds?" she said with a dismissive wave of her hand.

Ali saw the dog carrier in Madame Fifi's bedroom. She always thought it was sad that the little dog had to stay in there whenever Madame was away. Madame had many beautiful dresses in her room on a big clothes rack and said that little Babette was bad

when she used to go away; the dog would tear her dresses apart, so Babette ended up being put in a dog carrier when Madame was not at home.

“You are so cute, my little pirates, but I have to get beautiful for my show tonight.” She ushered Ali and Reynolds out of her apartment. As they began walking back to their apartment, their mother opened the door and said “Oh, there you are!. Everyone on the 7th floor is calling the switchboard and complaining about your knocking on their doors. Guess were not in California anymore.”

“Well, at least Madame Fifi gave us each a quarter,” said Reynolds with a shrug of his shoulders.

“Honey, I know your father called her that, but her name is Lili,” corrected their mother.

“And her little dog is Babette,” added Ali.

“I know this doesn’t sound exciting, but do you want to help me take the laundry down to the basement,” asked their mother.

“I didn’t know they had a basement here,” said Reynolds.

“Well they do, and there’s a washing machine and a bunch of racks for drying clothes down there. Actually it’s kind of spooky at nighttime,” said their mother knowing that might intrigue them to go with her.

“I’ll go,” volunteered Reynolds.

“Me, too” said Ali.

Caroline gathered up some laundry in a large basket. They went down to the basement on the service elevator, just off the garbage room near their apartment. It was kind of fun to pull the big cord that moved the elevator up and down, unlike the nice elevator up front that had an elevator man who operated it with a lever.

When they got to the basement level, they opened the cage-like door and ventured out. It really was spooky down there. Ali noticed that there were just a couple light bulbs here and there to light the way to where the washing machine was located.

“What are those noises mother? What’s that clanking and whooshing sound-----”

“Ghosts and goblins, Ali,” said Reynolds trying to scare his little sister.

For security, Ali held the back of her mother’s dress since her mother was carrying the basket of laundry.

“OOOOOOOOOOOOOO,” howled Reynolds just behind Ali.

“Knock it off, Reynolds,” snapped his mother.

The basement was damp and dark and had several turns this way and that way before they got to a little corner with one washing machine.

“I hope we can find our way back, Mother,” said Ali a little fearfully, glancing back into the darkness. While Caroline loaded the clothes, Reynolds slipped out of sight.

“There’s the first load,” said Caroline. “We’ll come back in about 30 minutes and put those on the drying racks and then put in a second load.”

“Reynolds is going to try to scare me, I know he is,” said Ali well aware of her brothers antics. He was always trying to frighten her.

“Maybe he’s heading back upstairs, Honey. Let’s go now. Reynolds where are you? We know you’re out there somewhere. Don’t make me-----”

Suddenly running at both of them was Reynolds with a sheet draped over his head wailing like a banshee, “OOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO.”

Unfortunately, the floors were slick and Reynolds went tumbling to the ground, knocking over a few laundry supply boxes along the way. Ali started to laugh at the sight of her brother wiggling around on the floor with the sheet all twisted around him and hollaring about how his leg hurt.

“Serves you right, young man,” said their mother.

They made their way back through the shadowy, labyrinthine basement with Reynolds limping along behind them.

* * * * *

18: “First Snowfall”

The first snowfall of the season came overnight while everyone slept. “Look, Mother, look out at the park and on the rooftops, everywhere there is snow,” Ali said excitedly. It looked absolutely magical to her. Caroline opened one eye and then the other, stumbling out of the sofa bed she slept on in the living room, and said “Well look at that, Honey, I didn’t know snow was in the forecast for last night.” Reynolds was already getting dressed and could hardly wait to go down stairs and start making some

snowballs.

“Hold on Reynolds, give me a few minutes to open my eyes and make a little coffee before we get bundled up to go out there”. Caroline was raised in Wisconsin and had seen plenty of snow during her childhood. She was in no hurry to go out in the freezing weather. She made some oatmeal for Ali and Reynolds, as well as some coffee to warm her insides.

They stepped out on the sidewalk and a cold blast of wind hit them in the face. “Invigorating,” said Caroline as she pulled her coat tightly around her and turned up her collar. They began walking in the new fallen snow on the sidewalks and then carefully picked their way through the slushy streets where the cars and taxis were already melting the freshly fallen snow. They crossed 59th Street and entered the park. Ali and Reynolds were thrilled to traipse through the drifts of snow that had no footprints except perhaps of a squirrel or two. Their boots sank far down into the snow. Snow plopped down off the branches onto their heads. Caroline stood off in the distance on the walking path, lifting one foot then the other, trying to warm herself.

“It’s good to see you two playing together,” said Caroline. She lit up a cigarette while watching her children scamper about in their fascination with the snow-covered wonderland.

“Mother, look----I’m smoking too,” said Ali as she blew air out of her mouth into the cold air giving the impression of someone smoking. They frolicked all the way to the zoo which was also blanketed with snow.

“I’ll bet the penguins and seals love this weather, but the tigers are probably staying inside,” said their mother. The seals were indeed splashing about and enjoying themselves almost as much as Ali and Reynolds. After about an hour, everyone started shivering and Caroline said it was time to get home and warm up. Reynolds helped his mother hail a cab on 5th Avenue, and they gratefully huddled in the back of the warm cab while looking out the window and seeing how beautiful everything looked.

“The city is all covered in white which makes the taxi’s and traffic lights look even brighter and prettier,” Ali exclaimed, pressing her nose to the window in the backseat of the cab.

When they got home, Caroline decided to call her mother long distance in California

and tell her about the snowfall. The kids sat at the table in the living room waiting to say a few words to their Grandma Agnes as well.

“Hello, Mother----guess what? It’s snowing in New York! It’s beautiful!” started Caroline. “Did you get the little heart-shaped photo of Ali and Reynolds I sent you? It says ”Always Thinking of You.”

“I’ll bet it’s as cold as all get out,” said Grandma Agnes adding, “Why haven’t you written me lately? I’ve got just one letter from you in two months, the one with that little photo of the kids. Why doesn’t Reynolds ever smile in his pictures? It’s like you guys just fell off the earth.”

Caroline rolled her eyes and shook her head at the kids who knew Grandma Agnes was probably going on about something she didn’t like. Caroline put the phone in between Reynolds and Ali’s head and they both shouted, “Hi Grandma----it’s snowing!” Grandma Agnes told them that she didn’t like snow because she was raised in Illinois and that it would be too soon if she ever saw any more snow. California was the only place to live as far as she was concerned.

Caroline pulled the phone back and told her mother about the many things they had done in the last couple of months since they arrived in New York.

“And where’s George? You haven’t mentioned him,” said Grandma Agnes.

“He’s as busy as ever with the show,” said Caroline. She decided not to talk about the troubles she and George were experiencing.

“Well, Mom, I just wanted to say a quick hello and let you know we are safe and sound----long distance adds up you know---so I’ll write you a long newsy letter later. Bye.”

When Thanksgiving came, Caroline was feeling lonely and wasn’t in the mood to cook a big Thanksgiving meal in their tiny kitchen. As usual, George was not going to be available. He had commitments to the show he said.

“Well, kids, let’s go somewhere for Thanksgiving. Where shall we go?” she asked Ali and Reynolds.

“The Pizza Giant,” they both yelled which had become their favorite place for spaghetti and meatballs.

“Well, that’s not exactly what we usually have, but what the heck, the Pizza Giant it

is,” said Caroline.

They walked five or six blocks to the restaurant on 9th Avenue and went inside. It was crowded and warm and merry. Perfect thought Caroline, it’s good to be around people who are enjoying themselves. Their usual waitress came up to them, wishing them a Happy Thanksgiving.

“And for you,” she said pointing at Ali, “spaghetti and meat balls and a Coke, right?”

“Yes” smiled Ali. It was nice that the lady remembered her.

“The same for me,” said Reynolds.

“I’ll have your oven broiled pork chops,” added Caroline.

“Coming right up,” responded the waitress.

“Here Reynolds, put a couple dimes in the machine and find some nice Christmas music----and not any loud stuff, OK?” Reynolds and Ali both made their way to the jukebox.

“She gave the dimes to me,” said Reynolds to his sister making it clear she would not participate in the selection. Ali shrugged her shoulders and went back to the table where she complained to her mother about Reynolds.

“It’s Thanksgiving, honey, can’t you two get along for even one day?” implored her mother. “Here’s two more dimes for you to put in, Ali.”

When the waitress went by, Caroline said, “And please bring me a big glass of red wine”. Pretty soon the room was filled with the Christmas song “Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas” to which Caroline said, “I’ll drink to that.” She raised her glass of wine and the kids raised their Coca-Colas up in the air and clinked glasses.

* * * * *

19: “The Rink and the Square”

George came by on Christmas Eve and brought some presents for everyone and then took his family to dinner at Schraft’s cafeteria across from the Osgood. Ali was happy to see him, and talked excitedly about Christmas to her father. Her mother and brother were quieter. After dinner, George suggested taking Ali and Reynolds to the skating rink in the park that he knew they would enjoy. After getting the children taken care of with their ice

skates and admittance tickets, George and Caroline bought some hot coffee and sat in the indoor café, watching Ali and Reynolds skate in circles around the huge outdoor rink while Christmas music played on the speaker system. Ali was very wobbly on her skates, falling quite a few times, but Reynolds was pretty good on the ice. The Christmas music played on and on as the children skated round and round.

“I think we’ve gone around the circle about a hundred times! My ankles are hurting,” Ali said as she tried skating along side her brother.

“You’re not doing it right. You’re suppose to keep your feet straight. You’re practically skating on your ankles,” instructed Reynolds who had a little experience skating at a small rink in the Valley. “Come over to the wall for a second.” They both skated away from the circle of people moving around the rink and slammed hard into the 3 foot high wall that surrounded the rink. Ali held tightly to the wall, slipping and sliding until she got her balance. Her nose was running and her hands were freezing because her mittens were soaked from falling down on the ice so many times.

“Look over at Mom and Dad,” said Reynolds. “Mom’s smoking and not looking at either Dad or us. Dad has that look on his face when he’s not happy. What do you think is going on?”

“I don’t know,” said Ali as she looked toward her parents through the café window.

“I hear them arguing in the apartment sometimes,” said Reynolds. “Something isn’t right. Ever since Dad moved back to the hotel, we hardly ever see him.”

A few minutes later, their parent’s waved for them to return to the skate shop. It was time to go. Caroline took a picture of George and the children standing under a lamplight near the pond on the way home from the skating rink, but mostly it was a very quiet walk home except for the Santa’s ringing their bells on street corners and taxis honking their horns in the city streets. Ali clung to her father for warmth. Caroline and Reynolds walked up ahead of them.

New Year’s Eve arrived a week later, and Caroline did not want to sit home alone with the kids. Her friends at work had told her that Times Square was the place to go to have a good time.

“Tonight, we will celebrate the last day of this year. Let’s go down to Times Square and celebrate with thousands of other people,” said Caroline to both Ali and Reynolds.

“Thousands?” said Ali in disbelief.

“Yep, all in one small area. Thousands of people gather around and celebrate the new year and the passing of the old year. Auld Lang Syne, they call it.” Caroline said she needed to get out and have some fun. George was at a theater party with his friends in the show.

“Great, let’s go,” said Reynolds who never missed a chance to go where things were loud and exciting.

“Now I want you guys to stay close to me, you hear?” warned their mother.

“Remember when we first got to New York and I lost Ali’s hand walking in the crowds in Times Square and she ended up being brought home in a police car? It was a good thing you remembered you lived at the Osgood, Ali,” said her mother looking down at her. Ali remembered. That was so scary losing her mother’s hand in the sea of people that swept her in one direction and her mother in another. She stood crying at a street corner until a nice lady talked to her and then took her to a policeman. She ended up in the middle of two policeman in a squad car and was brought back to the Osgood. Caroline had searched frantically for her, but finally went home and happily found Ali there in the lobby with New York’s finest.

“It’s cold out there tonight, so dress in your warmest clothes and wear the new jackets you got for Christmas,” directed their mother.

Soon they were making their way toward Times Square, stopping briefly near the steps of Carnegie Hall where an old woman was playing beautiful music on a violin. Her hair was long and gray and she did not look dressed for the cold weather. There was a cigar box near her where people threw coins as they passed.

“Can we put some money in there for her?” asked Ali. Her mother gave both Ali and Reynolds a little change which they dropped in the cigar box and the woman nodded her head slightly in thanks and kept on playing.

“That’s sad, Mother----she looks so cold and alone,” whispered Ali as they walked away.

There were incredible numbers of people walking up 7th Avenue that night. Caroline and her children passed the Hotel Wellington and the Park Sheraton, and as they reached 54th Street, Ali glanced in the direction of her school, but kept in stride with her mother

and held her hand. Reynolds on the other hand was dashing here and there looking in the store windows and every now and then yelling, "Mom, I'm over here!" Everything was brightly lit up and people were excited and talking loudly. "Happy New Year," someone would yell and then blow on a horn or throw confetti up in the air. They walked past the Hotel Taft and the Brass Rail. Ali was reading every sign out loud. Music was coming out of a place called the Metropole.

"What kind of music is that? yelled Ali over the din of the crowds.

"Jazz," responded her mother. Ali had never heard music like that.

"Just a few more blocks kids, and we'll be right in the middle of things. Stay close. Reynolds get over here right now. I don't want you to get separated from us," said Caroline firmly. Ali's neck craned to look up and see the brilliantly lighted signs on all the buildings, hotels and theaters up and down Times Square.

"Look CHEVROLET----- like our car in California," said Ali as she pointed to a sign high up on a building to their right. Her favorite sign was the one with the man blowing smoke out his mouth near the waterfall. "How do they do that with the smoke, mother?" asked Ali.

"What----I can hardly hear you, Honey. Just enjoy the evening and keep hold of my hand," said her mother as they got swallowed up in the crowd of revelers.

"Hey, Mom, look a Jerry Lewis movie at the Loew's----can we go sometime?" he asked. "We'll see," said Caroline who never liked to promise anything. She didn't like taking Reynolds to Jerry Lewis movies because afterwards he started acting foolishly, even at school. He'd clomp around the floor yelling "Hey Lady". Notes would be sent home to Caroline to remind Reynolds that he was not to act like a comedian in school.

It was getting close to midnight.

"Watch over there-----a sign will count down and it will be 1955!" said Caroline to her children. There was a sign below the Admiral Television Appliances sign that said "Happy Safe Year! STAY ALIVE FOR 55."

Cheering erupted amidst the hundreds of signs in Times Square. Horns were blowing and everyone was waving wildly and hugging each other. Caroline leaned down to Ali and Reynolds and gave them each a hug and a kiss.

"Happy New Year children," she said loudly to each of them.

“Happy New Year, mother,” said Ali in return, holding her hands to her ears because it was so noisy.

“Yeah, Mom, Happy New Year,” echoed Reynolds as he waved his arms about and yelled as loud as possible.

* * * * *

20: “The Drug Store”

When Ali and Reynolds returned home from school they sometimes watched television, but inevitably they began to fight with each other and Reynolds would shove Ali away and tell her to leave him alone, shutting the bedroom door and posting a “Keep Out” sign. Ali would usually leave the apartment and go around the block to The Drug Store on the corner of 58th Street and talk to her friend Iris who was the lady at the cash register at the front of the store.

Iris was a no nonsense lady who looked like somebody’s grandma, but had dyed-red hair and would never tell you how old she was. She took care of her duties like filling the cigarette display, as well as the candy and card counters, all the while keeping her eye on the customers who came to buy something. In between her tasks, she would talk to Ali who stood nearby.

“Happy Valentine’s Day, Ali, said Iris as she finished giving change to a customer. Iris put up all kinds of special displays, especially in the candy and card section for Valentine’s Day. Hearts were everywhere, even in the cigar section saying, “Remember him on this Special Day”.

“Get any Valentine’s cards today from your school friends?” asked Iris.

“Just a couple. It’s not the same as when you’re really little”, said Ali.

“Truer words were never spoken,” said Iris with a chuckle.

“Learn anything today?” Iris inquired.

“Not too much. Math is driving me crazy!” confided Ali.

“Enjoy school kid. Don’t be in a hurry to grow up like I was. I could hardly wait to get off the farm and come to New York to sing in a show----”

“Like my Daddy?” Ali interrupted.

“Yeah, but he actually got to sing in one. I never got through the door to even get a chance. There are more dreams broken than there are lights on Broadway, as the old saying goes. And here I am an old lady, selling cigars and looking out for bums who come in here to steal stuff,” added Iris as she glanced around to ensure no one was trying to swipe anything from any of the shelves.

“Do you ever catch anybody?” asked Ali.

“Sure do and when I do, I toss their----excuse my French---butts right out on the street. Sometimes we call the cops on them. Customer coming----” said Iris suddenly. That was Ali’s cue to be quiet. Sometimes, Iris would let Ali help put candy in the display area. After they had opened all the different boxes of candy and filled in the empty sections, Iris would give Ali a candy bar and deposit her own money in the cash register.

“Don’t want anyone to think we’re being dishonest. Happy Valentine’s Day, Ali,” said Iris as she gave Ali a small Whitman’s candy box.

“Thank you, Iris. I’ll take it home and share it with mother tonight.”

Ali went to the greeting card section of the store along the side wall, and selected two Valentine’s Day cards, one for her mother and one for her father, even though she wasn’t sure when she would see him. After paying Iris for the cards, she went over to the lunch counter and sat down to see if her funny friend Joe was there for the late afternoon shift. He was nice, unlike the man who got mad at her mother awhile back when she asked for cream and sugar. Joe wore a paper hat and a white jacket, and mostly sold ice cream sundaes and sandwiches to the customers. If it wasn’t busy at the fountain, he would let Ali wipe the counters and fill up the napkin holders. When everything was done, he would serve her a hot fudge sundae, and just like Iris, paid for it with his own money.

Ali noticed the old man at the end of the lunch counter who ate at the drugstore almost every day about 4PM. He would always be eating just one thing----a bowl of bean soup with crackers. He looked like he was about 100 years old and wore a bathrobe and slippers while a lady who looked like a nurse waited for him a few feet away.

“Old Mr. Brewster, there,” said Joe.

“He has a million dollars or more and lives upstairs in the apartment house that looks

out at the park, but never has anything more than bean soup and crackers,” Joe whispered to Ali.

“You’d think he’d get tired of that after awhile,” said Ali.

“Do you ever get tired of hot fudge sundaes?” Joe asked her kiddingly. he shook her head from side to side and got Joe’s point.

“Besides, the crackers are free and Mr. Brewster takes them upstairs and saves them for breakfast,” laughed Joe. Joe was studying at college and was going to be an engineer and build things.

“Yep, right now I’m building the world’s best ice cream creations, Ali, but one day I’ll be building bridges over the rivers that surround our great city. When I get that first bridge built, we’ll have to come back here and celebrate with a mile-high sundae. Or maybe a bowl of bean soup,” said Joe, being funny as always. Ali looked back at Mr. Brewster who was holding on to his nurse and tottering back to his apartment up above the drugstore.

“You know, maybe we both ought to eat more bean soup. After all, Mr. Brewster does have a million dollars, and he has lived to be very, very old,” said Joe as he wiped down the counter. “How about a super hot fudge sundae with a cherry on top for Valentine’s Day? You don’t even have to wipe down the counter for me.”

“That would be delicious, but I’d better get going before mother gets home. I need to sign my card to her and Daddy.”

“Well, I’ll give you a rain check on that,” said Joe with a smile as he waved at her and moved to where a customer had just seated himself on one of the lunch counter stools.

“See you, Joe. Bye Iris,” she said as she waved at both of her friends and started walking back to the Osgood.

* * * * *

21: “Valentine’s Day Surprise”

Ali was looking in one of the store windows on Broadway on the way home. There was a Parker pen and pencil set in the window display that she really liked. She leaned

into the window, cupping her hands to her face in order to see the price tag. She wished she had enough in her piggy bank for the pen and pencil set. Although she had a Valentine's Day card for her mother, she wanted to get her something nice that she could use in her office. Suddenly she heard her name.

"Ali, I was looking for you. Thought I might find you somewhere between the Osgood and The Drug Store," said her mother.

"Am I late mother?" asked Ali.

"No, it's just that I had something I wanted to talk to you about. Let's walk over to the park, OK?" This was curious thought Ali, since her mother usually didn't get home until at least 6PM. They crossed 59th street where Ali always looked over at Christopher Columbus who sat high on a pedestal as if he were directing traffic, and continued walking into the park. It seemed so long ago when she and her mother first walked through the autumn leaves there.

"Ali let's sit down for a while, I want to talk to you. I've already discussed this with Reynolds." Her mother reached into her purse for a cigarette. This was sounding very serious thought Ali as she sat there holding her bag with the Valentine's candy and cards at her side.

"There's no easy way to say this, but here goes." Ali's mother took a puff on her cigarette. "Your father's show is closing pretty soon, and he is going back to California." Her mother had a little catch in her voice.

"Are we are going back to California?" asked Ali who was puzzled by her mother's words.

"No, just your father. Honey, your father and I are-----separating. We're not going to be living together. It is very hard to explain so that you can understand. I want you to know he loves you and Reynolds. It has nothing to do with you kids."

"Doesn't he love you anymore, Mother?" asked Ali who was feeling very sad and somewhat confused.

"In a different way, I suppose." Her mother was sniffing and reached for a kleenex in her purse.

Seeing her mother with tears in her eyes made Ali want to do something to help her feel better, so she reached into her bag and handed her mother the Whitman's candy box

and the card she bought for her. “I didn’t get a chance to sign it,” said Ali, tears starting to form now in her own eyes. Ali leaned toward her mother and lay her head gently on her mother’s shoulder. It was the only thing she could think to do.

“I love you, Angel,” said her mother. “Thank you such a nice gift and card. Now, let’s get back home before we freeze out here. It’s getting dark. Let’s make a big pot of chili con carne. OK?”

“OK,” said Ali as they walked out of the park and back to the Osgood.

That evening after dinner, Ali’s mother called Grandma Agnes and Grandma Nettie to tell them that George was going back to California once his show closed which would be in a couple of months . Grandma Agnes thought it was crazy to stay in New York City without a husband and try to take care of two children. Grandma Nettie told her to follow her heart, after all George had followed his heart when he went into show business. After talking for a very long time to both of them, Caroline hung up the phone and turned to the children who were watching television. Actually, they were listening to their mother’s phone conversations at the same time they watched television (which is a very hard thing to do.)

“Well Grandma Agnes thinks I should go back to California, but Grandma Nettie thinks I should do whatever I think is best,” said Caroline shrugging her shoulders.

“What do you two think?”

“Heck, this place is way more exciting than the Valley. Dad was hardly ever home anyway, so what’s the difference?” said Reynolds who clearly had been at odds with his father over the last couple of months.

“I like it here, Mother. You’re here. My friends at The Drug Store are nice. I like school. I’ll miss Daddy though,” said Ali thoughtfully.

“I know you’ll miss your Daddy, Honey, so will I,” added Caroline a bit dejectedly as she walked over to the sofa and sat down in between her two children.

“So it’s unanimous, we’re staying,” said Caroline as she extended her arms around both of her children’s shoulders. Without missing a beat, Caroline added, “time to clean up the dinner table and get ready for bed.” Ali and Reynolds both groaned.

* * * * *

22: “A Parade, A Pinch, and a Goodbye”

St. Patrick's Day had arrived and Ali made sure she was wearing green, so as not to be pinched by anyone. Caroline told Ali she could come visit her to watch the annual parade from the windows of her office building that overlooked Broadway.

Caroline's office had many desks all lined up, row after row. Each desk had a black telephone, and some of them had a typewriter. Baskets that said “In” and “Out” were on the desks along with all kinds of paperwork, and smelly ashtrays that were filled with cigarette butts. There were many file cabinets lined up along all the walls and everything looked gray. The only color here and there were some festive green paper shamrocks and leprechauns scotch taped to a few desks and the bathroom doors.

“Hi, Honey,” said her mother as Ali walked up to her desk. Caroline stopped what she was doing and started walking Ali around the office to meet her friends at work.

“This is Norma-----”

“Well if it isn't a beautiful little shamrock, you've got there Caroline. So this is Ali. I see you're wearing green, the only color to be wearing this fine day,” said Norma holding out her hand to Ali. “So where's the other leprechaun you've got Caroline? The boy?”

“He's not coming, Mother,” offered Ali without any explanation. Reynolds preferred not to go anywhere with his sister anymore.

“Kids!” said Caroline quickly as they moved to another desk.

“Bill, this is my daughter, Ali.”

“How do you do young lady. Here today to view the parade from our illustrious building?” he said with a wink. Ali nodded yes. And around the office Caroline took Ali who shook hands and said hello to all her mother's friends who seemed to know who Ali was.

“Half the people here are Irish,” said her mother when they got back to her desk. “This is a big day for them.”

“Are we Irish, mother?” asked Ali.

“Just a wee bit----my grandmother was named Kate Scully and her parents came over from Ireland a long time ago. So, yes, we are Irish among other things.” Her mother tousled Ali's hair and took her to the windows facing Broadway. You could already hear

the bands playing down below.

“Everybody is Irish today,” yelled one of her mother’s co-workers.

There were many people walking and waving in the street below the office windows. Policemen on horseback walked alongside the parade route and the streets were lined with noisy, exuberant parade watchers.

“I think this is the best place to see the parade,” said Ali happily.

“I agree, Sweetie,” said her mother as she put her arm around Ali’s shoulders and bent forward to wave at the people in the parade down below.

Her mother suddenly said “Ouch,” and leaped forward a little.

“Who did that?” she demanded. No one admitted to it, but someone had pinched her.

“Sometimes they start celebrating just a little early around here with the green beer, I think,” said Ali’s mother, rubbing her backside.

Later, when Ali and her mother got in the elevator of the Osgood to go upstairs to their apartment, it took Albert, the elevator operator, about seven attempts to stop the elevator at the right landing. Too high. Too low. It was funny. Finally, Ali and her mother stepped up slightly and got out of the elevator and walked to their apartment. When the elevator doors closed, Caroline said, “He’s Irish, too. I think he’s been celebrating a wee bit too much also.”

A month later, as predicted, George’s show closed. One day while Caroline was working, George took both Ali and Reynolds to the carousel in Central Park. Ali was thrilled to see her father and spend the day with him. She skipped along the pathways leading to the carousel, holding her father’s hand, but occasionally dashed off toward a rock or a squirrel or anything else that looked interesting and worth exploring. Reynolds walked slower, choosing to distance himself from both Ali and his father.

“Look, Daddy, at all the trees-----they’re all green again. I saw a nest back there in the branches with the sound of baby birds.”

“Well, Pumpkin, it’s Springtime once again. All the trees have sprouted back their leaves just in time for the birds to build their nests, lay their eggs, and have a place to raise their baby birds. See, look back at the nest, Ali. The mother bird is bringing a worm to her newly-hatched babies.”

“Glad, I’m not a bird. Worms for breakfast. Ugh,” Ali said, making a face and

shuddering slightly.

“If you were a baby bird, you’d eat that little wiggling worm and think it delicious.”

Ali’s father patted his stomach as if he had just eaten a worm.

“Reynolds,” yelled her father, “try to keep a little closer.” Reynolds, with his hands in his pockets, continued to walk at his own pace.

“That, boy,” muttered George as they approached the carousel.

“Shall we all take a spin on one of the horses?” asked George, looking down at his daughter. Her smile said yes.

“How about you, Reynolds, what to go with us?”

“No, thanks. I’ll wait on the bench for you.”

“You sure?”

“I’m sure, Dad. You and Ali go ahead.” George looked at his son and shook his head in disappointment. Reynolds looked back at him in defiance.

It was hard for Ali to select just the right horse on the magnificent carousel. It reminded her of the carousel she used to ride in Griffith Park in California. Although she had given up all her cowgirl things when she came to New York, she still loved horses, even if they were carved in wood and painted in bright colors.

“This one, Daddy,” she said excitedly, picking a rather wild looking steed with his wooden mane carved in such a way that made it look like her horse was flying through the air at great speed.

“Kind of looks like the Lone Ranger’s horse. What was his name?” said her father as he helped her up and looped the safety rope around Ali’s waist.

“Silver! You know, Daddy. Hi, ho Silver.” Just at that moment the carousel began moving slowly, and then faster and faster to the tune of some music being played. George stood along side his daughter, as her horse rose up and down on the pole it was attached to. Ali’s father was humming loudly to the carousel music. The other kids seemed to be enjoying their ride as well, waving at their parents and holding tight to the horse poles.

After the ride, George and Ali joined Reynolds at the nearby bench.

“That was so much fun!” said Ali to her brother. Reynolds reluctantly responded with a grunt.

“What’s the matter with you, son? It’s like you’re on another planet lately.”

“You’re the one who wanted to bring us here today, Dad. We haven’t seen you in so long. What’s going on? I know the show closed. What’s going to happen now? Mom already talked to us awhile back about you leaving us and going back to California.” Reynolds was finally saying what he had been feeling for a long time. Ali sat apprehensively on the bench, watching her father and brother.

“No beating around the bush, huh, son. Well, you’re right the show closed. Had a good run, but sooner or later the lights go out. I brought you both here to spend a little time with you today, and to say I’m sorry I wasn’t able to spend more time with you during the run of the show.” George looked at both Ali and Reynolds who were seated on the bench next to him.

“I love you both. This is so complicated. Your mother and I have been apart for so long. I thought we could all come together again, but it has been a struggle.” While Ali listened, she could feel sadness coming over her. She, too, remembered the conversation with her mother a couple of months ago about her father leaving and going back to California, but chose not to think about it back then. Reynolds, however, was feeling anger towards his father.

“Why did you bring us to New York? To leave us here to go back to California? How funny is that, Dad?” Reynolds jumped up off the bench. He was angry, but had tears in his eyes. He started running down the path, away from the carousel and toward 59th Street.

“Daddy, are you going to get him?” asked Ali, looking up at her father.

“No, Pumpkin. He’ll be alright. He just needs to run off his feelings right now.” After a long pause, as they both watched Reynolds disappear in the distance, George turned to Ali.

“How are you doing, Honey. I’m sorry that our day has turned out like this.”

“When are you leaving, Daddy?” asked Ali, as she took his arm and rubbed her face against the sleeve of his shirt. He always smelled so good.

“Well, my little girl doesn’t beat around the bush either.” Ali’s father placed his strong arm around Ali and pulled her close.

“I’ll be going back to California in a couple of days. Your mother tells me she talked to you and Reynolds awhile back and that you all agreed that you wanted to stay in New

York.”

“But, I said I’d miss you, Daddy,” Ali added quickly.

“I know,” her father smiled, “your mother told me you said that. And I’ll miss you, too-----all of you. You’re a big girl now, you can write me and I’ll write you too, OK? I want you to tell me all about the things you do. Once I get settled and figure out what I’m going to do next, we’ll plan for you to come visit me, OK?”

“OK, Daddy.”

“As the matter of fact, I’ve been reading about a wonderful amusement park that will be opening near where we used to live. It’s called Disneyland. And you know what, Pumpkin? One of the many rides it will have is one called “Alice in Wonderland”. I thought of you. When we go there someday, that we be the very first ride we go on, OK?”

“OK, Daddy.” Ali and her father got up from the bench.

“Shall we buy a bag of peanuts to feed the squirrels, Pumpkin?”

“Can we buy 2 bags, one for the squirrels and one of us?”

“Absolutely. Two bags of peanuts coming right up.”

A few days later, George flew back to California.

* * * * *

23: “An Eventful Year”

It was a long, hot summer and without any air conditioning in their apartment, tempers were flaring. No one slept well and increasingly Ali and her brother were fighting. Caroline would come in to their bedroom to tell them to stop everything, “or else”.

“What is the or else?” said Reynolds.

“Keep it up and you’ll find out,” replied his mother standing in the doorway of the bedroom.

“Ali, you stay on your side and get to sleep, both of you.”

“I can’t sleep mother, I’ve got mosquito bites and Reynolds is being mean.”

“OK, Ali----- out here with me and Reynolds you stay there.”

The sofa bed was open and Caroline had the television on. She was watching a movie on the Late Show. The music to the Late Show sounded like a clock ticking which Ali had heard before when she stayed up late with her mother on weekends.

“I like that music.”

“Me, too, honey.”

“Hey, why can’t I stay up and watch television, too?” said Reynolds as he appeared from around the corner.

“Do you think you and Ali can refrain from fighting?” asked their mother.

“I guess,” said Reynolds with a shrug. Before long he was on one side of the sofa bed and Ali on the other with their mother in between to referee if necessary.

The television was still on an hour later as everyone was sound asleep with the music of the ticking clock on the Late Late Show. The television flickered in the darkened room.

In July, Caroline came home with some brochures about a private boy’s school called St. Andrew’s Choir School located just a few blocks away. She took Reynolds to the school one day where he was asked to sing. He opened his mouth and sang beautifully, somewhat to the surprise of his mother. He passed all the tests and was scheduled to start at St. Andrews in September. George assured Caroline in a letter that he would somehow come up with the tuition. Reynolds was now 12 and needed more oversight. The school would be good for him and it wasn’t too far away.

That same summer, Ali was given the responsibility of taking care of little Babette, Madame Fifi’s French poodle. She was going to make a little spending money and just had to provide fresh food and water for Babette and give the little dog two walks a day. She was given the key to Madame Fifi’s apartment in order to get Babette out of her dog carrier. The first day went fine, but on Sunday, when Ali opened the dog carrier, Babette flew out of the carrier and into the air and bit Ali on her face. Ali stumbled backwards into Madame Fifi’s dresser, while Babette held on to her mouth. The pain was terrible!. When the dog finally let go, Ali was dazed, but ran to the bathroom and grabbed a towel to press against her mouth and lip that was oozing blood. Ali then ran from Madame Fifi’s apartment, sobbing loudly and shutting the door behind her with a bang. Thank goodness her mother was at home as she pounded on their door, still sobbing and holding

the towel, now full of blood, to her face.

“Oh, my God,” said her mother “what happened?”

“Babette bit me,” she said with the towel still pressed to her face as she cried uncontrollably.

“Quick, come to the bathroom so I can see better,” said her mother fearful of what she was going to see.

Upon examination, Ali had a large gash on above her mouth, which quickly swelled to three times its usual size. Caroline hurriedly put some cold water on another towel and grabbed Ali by the hand to take her to the hospital. The elevator man helped pick up Ali and put her in the taxi, which rushed through traffic to Roosevelt Hospital. Even though there were lots of people in the emergency room, they took Ali to the operating room right away and placed her on a table, rinsing the blood from her face and placing a small napkin-size cloth with a hole over her face. Ali was in so much pain! She hadn’t stopped crying since Babette bounded out of her carrier so unexpectedly and bit her. Her eyes and face were pink and puffy from crying, and she was scared lying on the operating table. Her mother was nearby in the room with her.

“Needle,” said one doctor. The needle went into the gash.

“OWWWWWWWWWWW,” wailed Ali.

“It’s going to hurt a little more, my dear, but the doctor needs to put in a few stitches,” said a nurse who placed her hand on Ali’s shoulder to calm her down and keep her still for the doctor. Even under the little covering on her face, Ali could see a long silver instrument with a little hook on the end that the doctor used for stitching her wound. She was being sewn up like a torn pair of pants she thought, all the while sniffing, with her chest heaving up and down.

“There we go,” the doctor said as he finished sewing up her wound. He placed a small dressing over the stitches.

“Mrs. Spain, that was a pretty serious bite. Thirteen stitches just above her lip. She was lucky it wasn’t a little higher near her eye.”

Ali heard him and thought that “lucky” was the last thing she was feeling.

In the days that followed, Ali felt very self-conscious about the ugly stitches on her face. It was hard to eat and brush her teeth. Thank goodness it was summer and she didn’t

have to go to school yet. Reynolds was sympathetic at first, but after the bandage came off he started calling her Frankenstein. She liked it best when she was alone and could collect her stuffed animals around her on her bed. Smokey Bear was the leader of the pack, which now included a monkey in a red suit; a seal like the one at the park in the zoo; a tiger who was lying down, and a dalmation dog.

Ali would read for many hours while her mother was at work, but after awhile she would go out and take a walk in the park. She didn't want her friends at The Drug Store to see how awful she looked with her lip still swollen with little x's on the stitched area above her lip. She began walking with her head down, and her hand often times held up to her face. Actually, the good thing about walking down the street was that hardly anybody ever looked at anybody else. It was kind of nice to be invisible, especially right now thought Ali. She remembered how mad Madame Fifi was when she came home and found out that Babette had to be examined for rabies.

"Not my little Babette, she should not have to be quarantined," said Madame Fifi. Ali's mother insisted Madame come by and see how Ali looked. Madame did come by and brought Ali a stuffed animal. They all remained friends, but Ali was no longer to walk her dog. That was OK with Ali.

One afternoon, Ali found herself walking toward F.A.O. Schwartz, just across from the park. The toy store was the best place in the world to wander around. She would look, but not touch anything in order not to attract any attention. She went upstairs and looked at all the very large stuffed animals and swing sets. She got down on her knees to see the stuffed animal dogs behind the glass counter when a lady walked up to her.

"Hello," she said to Ali. Ali raised her hand to her face and stood up.

"Do you see anything you want?" the lady asked. Ali knew she wasn't a clerk because of the way she was dressed.

She wore white gloves, and had a very beautiful light blue suit on. She also wore a small hat and had white pearls around her neck. She had a warm voice and kind eyes. She looked like someone's rich grandmother.

"Yes," said Ali still holding her hand to her mouth.

"My dear," you don't have to cover your mouth. I've seen worse injuries than that. What happened?" she asked gently .

“A dog bit me,” said Ali softly.

“Oh, I bet that hurt a whole lot,” said the lady. “See any of the stuffed animals behind the glass that you’d like. I’m sort of partial to the fluffy dog over there.”

“He looks nice,” said Ali.

“Anything else? There has to be something else that you want. How about a game?” said the lady encouraging Ali to find at least one more item.

“I like “Break the Bank” on television,” said Ali. The lady turned to a clerk and asked her something and in just a few seconds, the clerk was holding both a “Break the Bank” game and the fluffy dog. She put them in a large bag. The lady with the white gloves signed something and then turned to Ali, handing her the bag.

“I want you to go home and enjoy these little gifts. Be careful with animals, but don’t become afraid of them. They are all wonderful creatures,” she added.

“Thank you,” said Ali as she turned to go back down the escalator. She could hardly wait to tell her mother about the nice lady in the toy store. As soon as she got home, she added “Fluffy” to her collection of animals on her bed. Later that evening, she played “Break the Bank” with her mother.

When Ali started the fourth grade in September, she continued to be self-conscious about the scar just above her lip. She avoided mirrors because she didn’t want to see the lopsided little mark that made her feel different now. But, with time and her mother’s encouragement, Ali finally overcame her embarrassment and her habit of placing her hand over her mouth when she talked to someone. Some of the kids in her class thought being bit by a ferocious dog, and being taken to the emergency room of a hospital during summer vacation was rather exciting and that Ali must have been quite brave. Ali assured them it wasn’t a good thing and had been very, very painful. She also told them that Babette wasn’t so much ferocious, as unhappy about being in a container all day. “Think how you’d feel being put in a box all day,” Ali told her school friends.

Ali’s father was very good about writing letters to her. The first one he wrote right after she was bitten assured her that she was still a beautiful little girl.

The only difference now, her father wrote, was that she now had a little mark on her face like the one he had on his chin when he fell off his bicycle when he was a little boy many years ago. That made Ali feel a little better. She and her father had matching scars.

Her father sent letters with air mail stamps from California every month. He was working at Lockheed again, and not singing anymore. He wrote that singing was a “young man’s game.” As soon as Ali received a letter, she would sit at the table in the living room and write a long letter back to her father about all the things going on in her life. She always asked her mother to help her make sure all the words were spelled correctly before she mailed it to her father. One of her longer letters that she wrote while she was in the fourth grade read as follows:

May 23, 1956

Dear Daddy,

Thank you for your last letter. Thank you for sending me the news clipping about Disneyland. I watch the Mickey Mouse Show after school and see commercials about all the rides at Disneyland. I am doing long division in school now and don’t like it at all. I love to read. I read a page every day of Little Women (the book you sent me after Babette bit me last year). Some words are hard, but Mother tells me to either skip them or look them up in the dictionary. Usually I skip them. Each week, I go to the school library and check out a book. I checked out Shane two times now. It’s about a cowboy who becomes a friend of a little boy and his family somewhere out West. When I read it, I got a little lonesome for California. I have some good friends that I like. I share my cookies with Annie sometimes, because she usually doesn’t have any. Annie and I were jumping rope and playing hop scotch and having a good time and all of the sudden it got late. When I got home, Mother had two policemen there and she was crying. She told me NEVER to stay out that late again. She hugged me and then shook me. She said she would write to you about it. Did she? I have another friend named Sharon. Sometimes I walk home with her after school. She lives in a really nice apartment across the street from the park. When we get to the front of her building where the awning is, she says “Good Riddance” and runs inside her building. Then, I walk home alone. Mother tells me not to walk with her anymore. My friend Gerald’s father owns a nice restaurant. We play there sometimes after school. Once we got in the freezer and tossed a lobster back and forth. Gerald’s father told us to go home. I wrote you about my friends at The Drug

Store, Iris and Joe. They are so nice. Sometimes I go to the Donnell library after school to do my homework. It is pretty close to school. I love all the books they have there. I have my own library card that says Alison Spain. I wish it said Ali Spain instead. If Mother is working late, I meet her at her office and type on her typewriter. I can't type fast like her, but I'm pretty good. The convention center across from Columbus Circle is done now----remember they were building it when we first got to New York? Don't forget to write me when you get this letter. I love you. Ali.

* * * * *

24: "Reynolds Sings in the Choir"

Reynolds was now attending St. Andrews Choir School where he not only went to school, but boarded there as well. It was nice not having him around pestering her all the time thought Ali. On Sundays Reynolds sang in the choir at St. Andrew's Church. Ali and her mother would walk to the church on 5th Avenue and sit right near the front where they could see Reynolds. Ali had rarely ever gone to church, and certainly not one as grand as St. Andrews.

The entry to the church had many stone steps in the front. As soon as you entered the church everything seemed quiet and cool and serene. Someone would give Ali's mother a program for the service and they would then walk down an aisle that had hundreds of wooden benches with little hymn and prayer books tucked away behind each bench. The ceilings were exceedingly high. The windows were beautiful and had different pictures made of colored glass with images of people and animals from the Bible. Many massive columns of stone rose from the marble floor to the ceiling of the church. The focal point of St. Andrews was above the altar, near where the choir sat. The whole front wall had carved ivory statues rising all the way to the ceiling. Jesus was right in the middle. During the Sunday services, large candles on the stage would be lighted by the choirboys, and later extinguished when the service was over.

"Ali, stand up. They're coming down the center aisle," whispered her mother. The organ music began and men in robes who were singing walked slowly down the center of the church and took their places in various seats on the stage. Behind the men were the

boys who sang in the choir. They all wore robes of black and white and carried books in their hands as they walked by each of the benches on the way to their seats near the altar.

“There’s Reynolds,” Ali whispered to her mother.

“I see, honey, sssshhhh now,” replied her mother. Before she saw Reynolds singing in the choir, Ali had no idea he could sing. He and the other boys sang like angels with high voices compared to the men in the choir who had deeper voices like Ali’s father.

Other than the singing, Ali wasn’t very interested in all the talking that the adults would do. But every time they were asked to take out their hymn books and sing, that was fun. The organ would play and everyone would stand up and sing for a couple of minutes. Then everyone would sit down and some man would start to talk again.

“Ali, sit still and stop swinging your legs,” said her mother more than once to her. Ali would just lean against her mother and wait for everyone to finish so they could take a Sunday walk up 5th Avenue and into the park.

* * * * *

25: “A New Best Friend”

It had been an exciting summer! A ship had sunk in the Atlantic Ocean, and she and her mother went down to the docks to see another ship bring back survivors. But when Ali tore off the “August” page from her calendar, she was happy to see the big red X on the day she would return to school and see all her friends again.

The clanging bells rang in the hallways of P.S. 69, and Ali and the other school kids rushed to their assigned classroom and took their seats, laughing and greeting one another after the long summer. Ali’s 5th grade teacher was Miss Watling. She was very pretty and much younger than Mrs. Goldie. With a brand new piece of chalk, Miss Watling printed a list on the blackboard of some of the subjects they would be studying. One of the items on the list was: the History of New York. That caught Ali’s eye.

She remembered when they first arrived in New York City, her mother told her that they had distant ancestors who were Dutch and lived in New York about 300 years ago. Their name was “Van Lent,” her mother said. They came from Holland and settled in New York. As the years went by, the Van Lent family moved west through Pennsylvania

and finally to Illinois where Mr. Van Lent became a blacksmith.

About a week after school began, a new girl was brought to class. She was being introduced to everyone, just like Ali was a couple years ago. The girl had long black hair that she wore in braids. Her skin was light brown, and she wore pretty beads around her neck.

“This is Zina Littlewolf,” said the lady from the office. “She’s new to our school”. One of the boys immediately began to howl like a wolf and there was some laughter that rippled through the room.

“Enough class,” said an annoyed Miss Watling. Ali remembered when she first came to P.S. 69 and was introduced in class and how awkward she felt. But the new girl didn’t seem to get embarrassed. She just stood there until she was asked to take a seat which was right next to Ali.

“Tell us a little about yourself Zina,” said Miss Watling.

“My mother and I just moved here from Albany. We are of the Oneida tribe of Indians. Our ancestors go back many centuries in New York,” said Zina without any hesitation. Just then, a boy in the back of the classroom put his hands to his mouth and made warwhooping sounds like the Indians on television when they were chasing a wagon train or the cavalry.

“Randall, it that necessary?----Sorry Zina,” said Miss Watling.

“That’s OK. I’ve heard it before,” Zina said calmly. Ali looked at her and liked her calmness. She didn’t seem to get upset with a dumb thing like a boy making fun of her. Ali remembered when her mother told her they were going to New York, “where they didn’t have any wild Indians.” Zina was an Indian, but not the kind she always saw on television.

“Well, we are very lucky to have you in class Zina. We’ll be studying the history of New York this year and I’m sure you’ll be able to enlighten us about your ancestors.” said Miss Watling with a smile as she moved on to other subjects.

Over the next couple of months, Ali became friends with Zina. She learned that Zina’s mother worked at a museum. Zina lived with her working mother, just like Ali lived alone with her mother now that Reynolds was away in school and her father had returned to California. Often times they would play in the park after school or go to the

library together. One day they walked all the way down to Times Square to Woolworth's where the Planter's peanut man tapped on the window making little dents on the glass. They wandered around the bins in the store, looking at the play jewelry and the books. Ali would always pick up a book about an animal, like "Original Joe", and start flipping through the pages until she was told to either buy the book or leave by a clerk. She and Zina would run down Broadway through the throngs of people, eventually making their way to an old hotel where Zina lived.

One day Miss Watling told her class that they were going on a field trip to the American Museum of Natural History near the park. What an incredible place! Mrs. Watling had her class gather in the lobby near the enormous dinosaur display. The bony dinosaur was fascinating, but

Ali and Zina walked over to a mural depicting a handful of Dutch settlers who once lived in Manhattan in the early 1600's. New York was called New Amsterdam way back then.

"I wonder if any of those people were named Van Lent," said Ali to Zina as they stood in front of the mural. "The Van Lent's came from Holland and were my relatives," said Ali proudly. Zina smiled and said, "my mother and I come here to see the displays all the time. Follow me, I'll show you my relatives from a long time ago who were here to welcome the Van Lent's." When the class reached the Native American Indian floor, Zina led Ali over to the displays she had mentioned earlier.

"Look," said Zina as she pointed to a beautiful display showing Indians rowing a boat, making pottery and engaged in other activities from long ago.

"Maybe his name was Littlewolf. Who knows, maybe the Van Lent's and the Littlewolf's met each other hundreds of years ago, and here you and I are today. My mother says that everywhere, everything is connected to everything else."

Ali thought about Zina's words. What an amazing idea that her family and Zina's family might have known each other hundreds of years ago right there on the island of Manhattan!

* * * * *

26: “Dining Out with Ernie”

Since Ali’s father left, Ali’s mother started going out in the evening. Sometimes Caroline joined her friends from work and went dining and dancing. One evening Caroline introduced Ali to a gentleman named Ernie. He had white hair and a nice smile. Ali thought he looked like a nice grandpa. He immediately reached down and shook Ali’s hand saying, “It’s a pleasure to meet you young lady. Your mother tells me you do well in school. Is that true?”

“Yes, pretty good----I like to read,” replied Ali a little shyly.

“Well, you’ll have to join your mother and me tonight and tell me about the books you like to read. I’m sure we’ll have a lot to talk about.”

They walked down 7th Avenue a couple of blocks to the Park Sheraton hotel. Just before going in the front door,

Ali pointed to the corner where a barbershop was located.

“I saw a man get shot there last month.”

“You saw a person under a white sheet, being put into an ambulance,” corrected her mother.

“I was coming home for lunch-----there were hundreds of people all around and a lot of policemen,” added Ali, recalling the crowds on that October day. It was like something you see in the movies, not in real life.

“Yes, I remember reading about that in the newspaper. So you were there? Pretty dangerous stuff. Never know what’s going to happen in this big city,” responded Ernie who had lived in New York City his whole life.

“Better move along, Honey. We’ll share the gory details with Ernie later, OK?,” said Ali’s mother, scooting Ali past the doorman and into the hotel lobby.

The hotel had the most wonderful restaurant. The nicest Ali had ever seen. Musicians in the restaurant played music like she heard that night on New Year’s Eve---jazz---she remembered her mother saying. The tablecloths were bright white and the waiters wore special black and white suits and bowed as they came to the table. Ali ordered spaghetti and meatballs.

“Honey why don’t you order something different for a change,” suggested her mother.

“But I like spaghetti and meatballs,” said Ali.

“The lady knows what she wants,” said Ernie to the waiter.

“And to drink?”

“A Coke” said Ali. Her mother rolled her eyes. Ali was so predictable.

“And for dessert tonight?” said the waiter.

“Let’s get a French Apple pie to take home later, said Ernie.

Ali loved apple pie, and a whole one to take home, that sounded wonderful. The dinner was delicious. There was a man who came around and took their photograph which Ernie later gave to Ali and her mother as a souvenir. Ernie even asked Ali to dance, but she shook her head emphatically no.

“Do you mind if your mother and I dance a little?” Ernie asked. No one had ever asked her permission like that before. She felt important.

“No, I don’t mind,” smiled Ali as Ernie and her mother stepped onto the dance floor and glided around smiling and laughing. Ernie was several inches shorter than Ali’s mother who everyone always said was “so tall, like a model.” Caroline’s long brown hair was quite a contrast to Ernie’s pure white hair. It was good to see her mother enjoying herself thought Ali. Later, Ernie and her mother walked Ali back to the Osgood and dropped her off. “Now don’t eat the entire pie while I’m gone, Ali,” said her mother. I’ll be back in a couple hours. You can have some apple pie, watch some television, brush your teeth and then go to bed, OK? If you need anything, go to Madame Fifi’s, across the hall.”

“It’s been a pleasure meeting you, Ali. We’ll have to do this again sometime,” added Ernie, shaking Ali’s hand once again.

Ali shut the door and locked it, and took the apple pie to the kitchen. This was one of the first times she had been left alone so late at night. It felt kind of funny to be alone in the apartment, but she wasn’t scared. Reynolds wasn’t there to annoy her. She could go to Madame Fifi’s if necessary. She settled in for the evening, opening her mother’s sofa bed in the living room, and turning on the television. She put on her pajama’s and sliced an extra large piece of pie, put it on a plate, grabbed a fork, and jumped in the sofa bed. Usually, if her mother was at home, they would watch a movie on the Late Show, but tonight she watched a man who reminded her of her father and made her laugh. His name

was Steve Allen and he was telling jokes and playing the piano and singing. Ali looked out the window and thought how beautiful it was, especially when she turned off the lights in the living room. You could see lights out across the park and in people's windows in other apartment buildings nearby. You could hear the cars honking way down below and sometimes the sirens of fire engines on 58th Street behind their apartment building would start wailing in the middle of the night.

When Caroline came home sometime after midnight, she found Ali sleeping in the sofa bed with an empty plate on the floor. The national anthem was playing on the television indicating the end of programming for the evening; Caroline leaned over and switched off the television.

"Mother, is that you," asked Ali sleepily.

"Yes, Angel----now go back to sleep." Caroline got ready for bed and slipped into the sofa bed alongside Ali.

"Did you have a good time tonight, mother?" asked Ali, only half-awake.

"Wonderful, Ernie and I could have danced all night, just like the song in "My Fair Lady."

"That's good," said Ali as she dozed off to sleep next to her mother.

* * * * *

27: "Keep Your Eye Upon the Donut"

Ali and her mother had grown very close since they had been on their own in New York City. When Caroline got home in the evening, it wasn't unusual for her to say "Grab your coat, Honey. Let's go to dinner and a movie tonight." Usually they would go to the old standby, The Pizza Giant, order their usual favorites dishes, and play a couple of songs on the jukebox. Ali's mother gave her several dimes. "OK, find something by Frank Sinatra or Dean Martin for me, and pick one you want." Ali would pick an Elvis Presly song; she especially liked the Hound Dog song, even though the words seemed odd.

"What does that mean when he says "you ain't never caught a rabbit so you ain't no friend of mine?" Ali asked her mother.

“I have no idea,” her mother responded rolling her eyes and shaking her head from side to side. While waiting for their dinner, Ali would have her mother quiz her on capitals of the world or capitals of the states.

“Utah?” her mother asked.

“Salt Lake City, Ali quickly responded.

“Canada?”

“Ottawa.” Ali was proud of her ability to remember the capitals. Ali urged her mother to keep quizzing her throughout dinner.

“OK, enough Ali. Time to eat some of your spaghetti before it gets cold!”

After dinner, they would usually walk down to Times Square to see a movie. Occasionally, they went to the Mayflower donut shop for a late night snack. Ali had memorized the sign on the wall that said:

“As you ramble on through life brother, wherever you may go, keep your eye upon the donut, and not upon the hole”.

“What do you think that means?” Ali inquired of her mother.

“It means that you should be happy with what is there and not what isn’t there,” responded her mother. “The donut is there, and the hole isn’t.”

Later they would start walking home and Ali would start begging her mother to catch a taxi.

“I’m so tired,” said Ali.

“Just a good stretch of the legs, Honey,” her mother replied.

Reynolds rarely came home even on the holidays. He preferred to visit with friends his own age from St. Andrews. The parents of the boys at St. Andrews were wealthy and lived in nice places like Long Island and

Connecticut. When he did come home, he didn’t seem to enjoy doing anything with either his mother or his sister.

“What’s the matter with him, anyway?” Ali said indignantly one night.

“He’s just growing up, Sweetie. Leave him alone,” was all her mother would say. Caroline was pleased that Reynolds was doing well in school, even if he was becoming an increasingly distant teen-ager.

For her birthday, Ali received the most wonderful gift from her mother’s friend,

Ernie. A brand new, red, shiny bicycle! She hadn't ridden a bicycle since she lived in the Valley. But this bicycle was so much nicer than the hand-me-down bicycle she inherited from her brother when she was six. This one even had a little black leather satchel behind the seat where you could put special things like your apartment key, change, or a pack of Chuckles. Ernie owned a sporting goods and knew Ali was hoping for a bicycle.

"You do so well in school Ali, and you were so brave after the whole dog-bite incident awhile back. I wanted you to have something special," said Ernie. Ali was overjoyed. She did not ride it in the city streets, since that was too dangerous. But on weekends, she and her mother would go to the park where there was a bicycle path and she would ride while her mother watched her.

After each time she took the bicycle out, she would walk it back home through the streets between the park and the Osgood, then through the lobby, up the elevator, and back into their apartment where she would shine it up with glass cleaner. The bike was parked in her bedroom and every night she looked at it as she fell asleep, feeling very fortunate for such a gift.

Toward the end of summer, Ali went to the park alone. She hadn't actually gotten permission to take the bike to the park by herself, but it was so hot and so boring back at the apartment, that she just decided to go. She planned be home before her mother got home from work. Because the day was so uncomfortably hot, Ali bought an ice cream from a vendor near the entrance of the park and put the ice cream bar in her little satchel behind the seat along with the change, which was about 35 cents.

She decided to get on the bicycle path and pedal around awhile until she found a nice shady place to sit and eat her ice cream. Off she went, sailing down the pathway on her bicycle. The sun shone through the tree leaves, and the squirrels and pigeons darted out of the way of her bicycle. She saw two boys up ahead on the bicycle path, sitting on the railing which separated the path from the roadway where the cars, taxi's, and horse carriages traveled. She had a momentary thought that something wasn't quite right. She was thinking of turning around and going in the opposite direction, but decided that she was being foolish. So she kept going toward the boys.

As Ali approached the two boys, they leaped off the railing and grabbed her bicycle handles! She suddenly found herself on the ground and watched in amazement as one boy

rode away with her bike and the other ran off through the bushes. She looked around and saw absolutely no one around. Right there, in the middle of the park, in the middle of the day, there were no cars, no mothers walking with their children, and no old folks feeding the pigeons. In a moment, she was up and running after the boy who had stolen her bike.

“My bicycle, my bicycle, come back, my ice cream is melting-----” she yelled. The boy on the bicycle looked back at her and actually looked a little afraid that she was gaining on him; Ali could see his face. He pedaled much faster and was soon out of sight. Ali was shaken, but not really hurt. She did something dumb, and she lost her bike in the process. She rubbed her elbow, and stomped in anger on the pavement.

“It’s not fair,” Ali yelled to absolutely no one in particular.

Later that evening, her mother told her how lessons are sometimes learned the hard way.

“But, my bicycle, mother----do you think I’ll ever get it back.”

“Probably not,” was all her mother said.

“It’s not fair,” Ali said again, this time to her mother.

“Keep your eye upon the donut, Ali. Be grateful for what you do have.”

That night, as Ali lay in bed, she looked over to the spot she had parked her bicycle each night. All she saw was a big, empty hole.

* * * * *

28: “Spring Prom, Graduation, and a Visit from Father”

Ali had been invited to the Spring Prom at St. Andrews by one of Reynolds’ friends, Scott Von Osterlitz. He had met Ali when Reynolds brought him home during the holidays and Scott thought Ali was smart and cute. Ali was in the 6th grade now and reading more books than ever, including one that Scott had also read, “The Old Man of the Sea”. Scott and Ali liked talking about the old fisherman in the book and the great fish he had caught and later lost. Reynolds found it hard to believe anyone might think his sister was either smart or cute.

“You want to invite my sister? She’s just eleven, a 6th grader for heavens sake! She doesn’t even know how to dance. Are you sure?” Reynolds asked Scott. Scott liked to

read, like Ali, and enjoyed talking to her about books.

“Yes, I’d like to go to the prom with Ali,” said Scott firmly. When Ali’s mother told her about the prom, Ali was not at all sure that she wanted to go.

“I don’t have anything to wear. I don’t know how to dance, Mother,” protested Ali who had never gone to anything like a prom before. Ali felt very good about her abilities to read, climb rocks and trees, and throw a dodge ball in the play yard, but the idea of dancing with a boy made her very unsure of herself.

“You know Scott, he’s a very nice young man. I’ll teach you a few simple steps, it’s easy. I don’t know what they dance to at a prom nowadays, but let’s try dancing to a little Frank Sinatra music,” said Caroline encouragingly to her reluctant daughter. Within a few days, Caroline taught Ali where to put her arms, and how to step from side to side as if making a square.

“Don’t be nervous, just relax and have a good time. You know how much I like to dance. I’m sure you’ll take right to it.”

Caroline took Ali to Macy’s where they found a pretty white dress with a special short-sleeved black velveteen jacket. There were delicate flowers on the collar and the whole outfit was set off with a lovely black velvet necklace with a little heart hanging in the front. Ali would wear her patent leather shoes that just needed to be shined up a little.

The night of the prom, Ali and her mother took a taxi to St. Andrews school. Many of the parents were seated up on a raised platform, chatting among themselves when Caroline and Ali arrived. Scott came up right away with a small corsage and tried to pin it to Ali’s dress.

“I’m a little nervous” he confided to Ali.

“Me, too” said Ali with a smile.

“Hey, squirt. Long time no see,” said Reynolds from a few feet away. Ali gave him a quick wave. The girl he was with was very pretty and probably about the same age as Reynolds. She looked far more grown up than Ali.

“Jennifer Brewster, this is my sister, Ali. You know Scott, ” said Reynolds in a very grown-up way.

“Hi,” was all Ali could think to say.

“Charmed, I’m sure,” said Jennifer Brewster. Ali wondered if she was related to the

rich man who ate bean soup at The Drug Store. She seemed like a rich girl, in fact almost everybody there seemed like they were rich. Many of the women were wearing furs; their husbands were wearing handsome suits and ties, with perfectly shined shoes. Ali looked over at her mother who was talking to Mr. Peterson, the Headmaster of the school.

“Reynolds is doing fabulously at St. Andrews,” said Mr. Peterson. “He was a little rough around the edges upon his arrival, but he’s taken to St. Andrews very well. We are pleased with his progress. I’m even considering him for the Headmaster’s award that is given to our very best and brightest graduating student in June.” Caroline was so proud. Her son Reynolds who had been such a handful and had become so moody the last couple years was doing well. She felt guilty about the fact she and George were no longer together and that he didn’t have a father figure around as a role model.

“That is so wonderful to hear, Mr. Peterson. I can’t tell you how happy that makes me,” said Caroline to the Headmaster.

“Very good, then. I hope you and Reynolds and your little girl enjoy the little soiree we’re having this evening.” Mr. Peterson moved along to talk to another parent. The music was playing and the boys of St. Andrews and their dates were tentatively taking their first steps on the floor. Ali’s palms were sweating, but she was enjoying herself. Dancing wasn’t easy, but her mother had taught her just enough for her to move around the floor with Scott. One of the dances required that the girls put one of their shoes in the middle of the floor; each boy would then have to try to find his date’s shoe. Scott took a long time, but finally brought Ali’s shoe back to her.

“I didn’t realize what a big shoe you had,” he said, not realizing how it sounded. Ali’s cheeks flushed a bit thinking about the big shoe remark, but she didn’t say anything to Scott. The prom came to a close and Caroline and Ali started walking back to the Osgood a few blocks away.

“Mother, do I have big feet?” Ali suddenly asked her mother.

“What?” Caroline said with a puzzled look on her face.

“Never mind. Can we stop at the delicatessen for some rice pudding?”

Ali, pulled her new black velveteen jacket around her shoulders.

“Sounds good to me, Angel,” responded her mother.

June had arrived, and Reynolds’ graduation from St. Andrews was just a few days

away. Caroline had written to George about Reynolds being selected for the prestigious Headmaster's award. Although finances were a little tight, George said he would fly to New York City for the graduation. Reynolds had a class picture taken showing he and eleven other boys standing proudly in their St. Andrews' suits with the school insignia on their breast pockets. Reynolds was the tallest boy in the class.

The highlight of the graduation ceremony came when Reynolds was called to receive the Headmaster's Award. Even Ali felt a certain pride in the fact that her brother was receiving such a special honor. Mr. Peterson talked about Reynolds and how well he had done in his music classes, his Latin and French classes, as well as his excellence on the baseball field and basketball court.

Clearly, Reynolds appeared happy with the trophy that he held up for all to see.

Later the family all went to dinner at the Pizza Giant and congratulated Reynolds for his achievements and discussed plans for him to go to a prep school in upstate New York.

"That's my boy," said George putting his arm around Reynolds.

"It's not that big of a deal, Dad," replied Reynolds slowly moving away from his father's embrace.

"Well, I think it is," said his mother.

"With the scholarship you're getting and the summer work program, I think we'll be able to swing the prep school," said George. Ali looked at Reynolds. He seemed so much older than when they first came to New York a few years ago, but he still seemed unhappy. She couldn't put her finger on it, but Reynolds never seemed satisfied, even with all the attention he was getting tonight.

"And you, young lady. I hear you were dancing at St. Andrew's recently with some handsome young man," said her father turning to her.

"Yes, Dad. Scott was very nice even if he did think I had big feet," said Ali. Everyone laughed at that.

"I don't know if I like my little girl growing up so much, going to dances with boys and not calling me Daddy anymore," responded her father.

"Ali did very well in school this year. All A's in her 6th grade class," added her mother.

"Another scholar in the family" said George proudly. They talked and ate and in

celebration of Reynolds graduation, George had purchased tickets to “West Side Story”, a new Broadway show.

“You know I love good music. Leonard Bernstein wrote the music-----”

“He lives in our building. I’ve seen him in the lobby a lot of times,” added Ali, proud that a famous person lived in her apartment building.

“Yes, a very talented man,” said her father. “The show’s story is set right here in New York City. Well, we better get going or we’ll be late.” George put some money on the table and ushered his family out to the street to hail a taxi.

After the show, George began singing one of the songs from the show: “Maria, Maria, I’ve just met a girl named Maria.” Ali remembered how her father sang everywhere, including in the middle of a crowded street. Reynolds looked at his father and thought that the name “Maria” sounded a lot like “Marsha”, but didn’t say anything.

“I loved the music and the show, George. Thank you so much for everything, especially coming here for Reynolds’ graduation,” said Caroline who always said the right thing.

“How about a little late night dessert?” asked George.

“Can we go to The Drug Store, Dad. I’d like you to meet my friends,” implored Ali.

“Well, it’s a little out of the way, but if that’s what you want Pumpkin, lead the way,” said George. Ali happily led the way to The Drug Store and introduced Iris and Joe to her father.

“Howdy, Mr. Spain, nice to meet you finally,” said Iris. “Your little girl keeps me company here in the afternoon and helps me with the counter. One day she hula hooped so long over there, we finally had to stop her before she passed out,” added Iris, smiling at Ali.

“That’s my little girl,” said George. Caroline and Reynolds already knew Iris and took seats over at the fountain.

“Is Joe here?” Ali asked Iris.

“In the back somewhere, should be out in a moment,” Iris said as she turned to a customer. Ali loved sharing her special place with her family. Joe and Iris felt almost like family to her since she first met them a few years ago.

Ali spotted Joe bringing in some drums of ice cream for the fountain.

“Hi Joe, we’re here for some dessert,” said Ali, smiling at Joe.

“Well, hello, hello to Ali’s family,” said Joe. Introductions were made and Joe asked them what they wanted for the special occasion.

“Let’s make it easy, four hot fudge sundaes. Does that work for everyone?” George inquired. They all agreed. Joe quickly started preparing his expertly crafted ice cream creations for Ali and her family.

“You know Ali, the show we saw tonight had a serious side,” began her father. “Your mother tells me that the school you’re suppose to go to next year is in a pretty tough neighborhood. I want you to think about coming back to California with me and going to junior high school in the Valley.”

“And leave mother?” said Ali with a frown.

“Honey, I’m thinking of going back to California real soon. As soon as Reynolds is situated at his new school and I can get a transfer back to my old job in California,” said Ali’s mother. Ali’s mind was racing. Leave New York? Leave her mother? She loved her father, but she hadn’t been around him for so long, it seemed foreign to her, the idea of going to live with him in California.

“All I want you to do is think about it,” said George, placing his hand on top of her hair softly.

“Four hot fudge sundaes coming up,” said Joe as he set them in front of Ali, Reynolds, Caroline and George.

“No charge,” said Joe as he winked at Ali. Ali sat eating her not fudge sundae thinking very hard about what he father had just said.

* * * * *

29: “Strange Dream – Ali in Wonderland”

Ali could hardly sleep that night. She kept thinking about going back to California. She tossed and turned and had a mixed-up, crazy dream about her family and people she had met in New York City. The dream was very strange, indeed, like something out of her favorite book that she brought to New York years ago, Alice in Wonderland. In the dream, she was Alice, dressed in the white prom dress and velveteen jacket she wore

recently, running through the streets with a pizza in her hand. Reynolds was the Mad Hatter saying, “Hey Lady” to everyone and stomping about like Jerry Lewis. “Marsha darling”, the redheaded lady in the restaurant window holding her father’s hands was the Queen of Hearts. One moment in the dream Ali would be snoring at St. Andrews, and the next, a tiger was biting her face at the zoo and telling her how delicious she tasted. Joe was swirling whipped cream into old man Brewster’s bean soup at the drugstore, as Iris stood on the top of the lunch counter singing. Zina was paddling a canoe in the museum, even though there was no water. Ali’s father was playing with a rope while singing “Fate can play a trick with a twine”. Madame Fifi was playing her piano wildly while Babette ran around chewing up all of Madame’s gowns. Her mother was running across 57th street yelling, “I’m late, I’m late, get out of my way, I’m late for work.”

“Ali, wake up, you’re having a bad dream,” said her mother. Ali pulled herself out of her dream and opened her eyes.

“You kept saying you’re late,” said her mother.

“No, Mother, you kept saying you were late,” said Ali sleepily.

“No matter----try to get back to sleep, Angel,” Her mother lightly ran her hand over Ali’s flushed face and touched her forehead.

Very early the next morning, Ali quietly dressed and left the apartment as her mother and brother slept. She went straight to the park and headed for the playground swings. She remembered swinging in Mrs. Amity’s backyard in the Valley. She was so much bigger now, but the memories were still fresh. Hardly anyone was around in the park except a few dog walkers. The squirrels would stop and look at Ali and then vanish quickly up a tree.

“So what do you think, Mr. Squirrel?” asked Ali. A squirrel had stopped to look at her. He was totally still, with his tail pointing straight up in the air.

“Should I go back to California?” asked Ali out loud. The squirrel twitched a second, and then ran off. She continued swinging for the longest time, looking at all the familiar sites in the park like the tall buildings that formed a rectangle around all the greenery of Central Park and her favorite climbing rocks a short distance from the swings. She thought about the castle she had seen from their window of the Osgood when they first arrived. She never got to explore it like she planned.

Ali heard singing behind her.

“Rhymes, sweet rhymes, fine rhymes have I,” sang her father softly as she turned quickly and saw him standing behind the chain link fence.

“How did you find me?” asked Ali.

“Just a good guess. Your mother told me you’d either be at The Drug Store or the playground,” said her father with a slight smile. Ali could see her mother and Reynolds in the distance standing near a bench.

“Ali, I just want you to think about coming back to California. The decision will be yours. Remember, your mother will be coming back to California in the near future.”

“OK, Dad. I’ll think about it,” said Ali, slipping off the swing and walking toward the entryway to the playground where she met her father.

“So, Dad, have you gone to Disneyland yet?”

“Not yet. I’m waiting for you.” He reached down to take her hand, and Ali smiled up at him, placing her hand in his. They walked toward her mother and Reynolds who were waiting in the distance.

* * * * *

About the Author

Valarie M. Vine was born in Hollywood, California. She loved reading from an early age, and started writing as a teen-ager. The five years she lived in New York City as a child were transformative. She wrote light verse for a long stretch, heavily influenced by Ogden Nash, and Dr. Seuss. One of her poems “Of Late There Has Been a Quite Desperate Raven” was published in The Missile, a Navy newspaper at Point Mugu, California where she worked as a secretary for 20 years. After thinking about writing A Little Orange in the Big Apple for many, many years, she finally wrote it in 2009. She has lived with an assortment of beloved cats and dogs at Hollywood Beach, California for over 30 years.