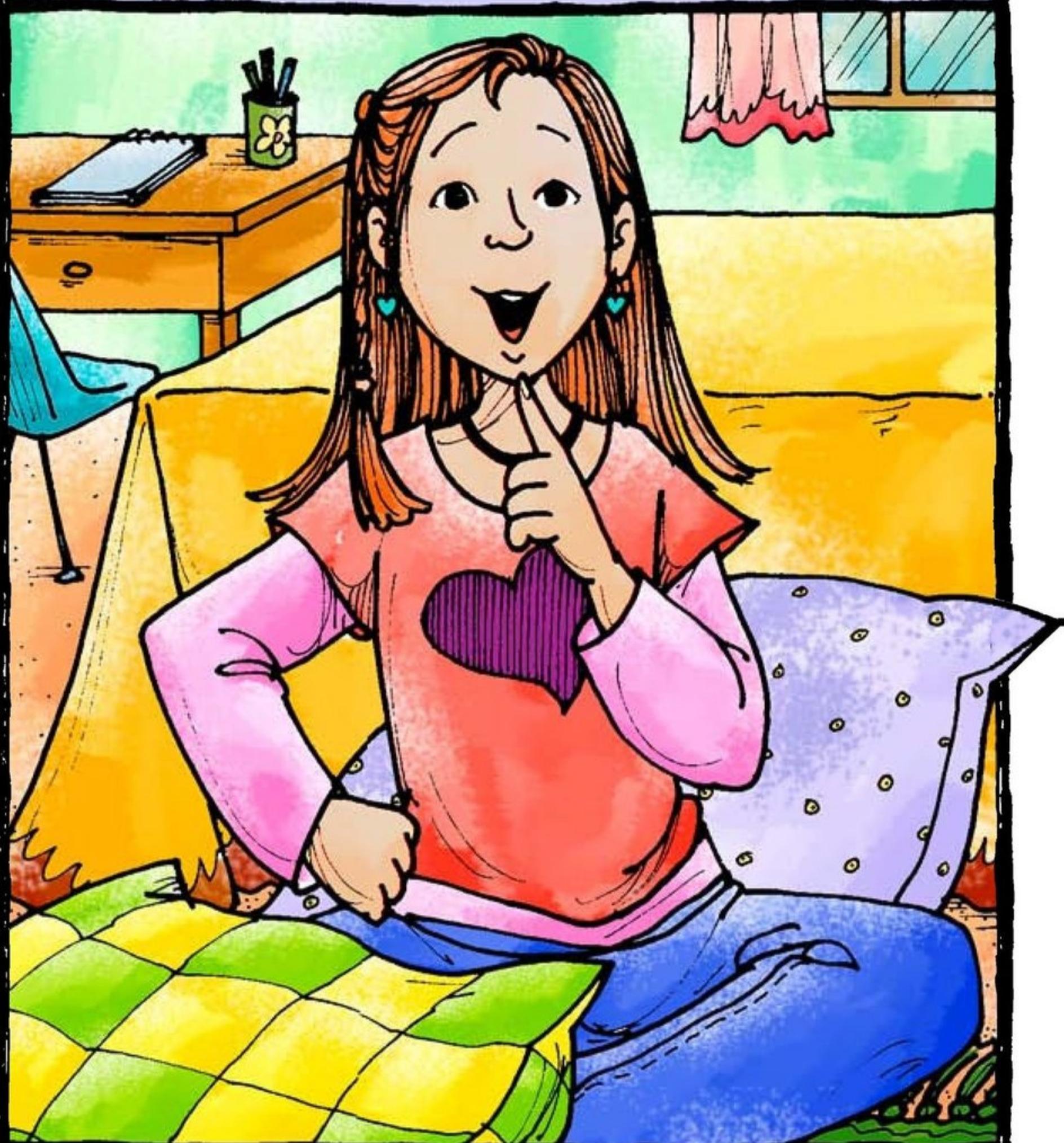


LEVELED BOOK • Q

# ElevenTeen



Written by Annette Carruthers  
Illustrated by Michelle Dorenkamp

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Sarah turned eleventeen yesterday, which made it a very special day. A person can turn eleventeen only once, and most people never turn eleventeen at all.

In fact, I'll let you in on a little secret. Sarah is the only person who has ever turned eleventeen. Ever! Not a single other living soul has done it. Not a single other dead soul has done it either.

You're probably wondering how Sarah accomplished this rare and extraordinary feat. This, of course, is that story.

"I'm bored," said Sarah, as she walked into the kitchen for breakfast one Saturday morning.

"Would you like to invite a friend over?" asked her mother.

"No," said Sarah, "that's not the problem. I'm bored being ten."

"Well, your birthday is only a few weeks away," said her mother, "so you won't have to be ten much longer."



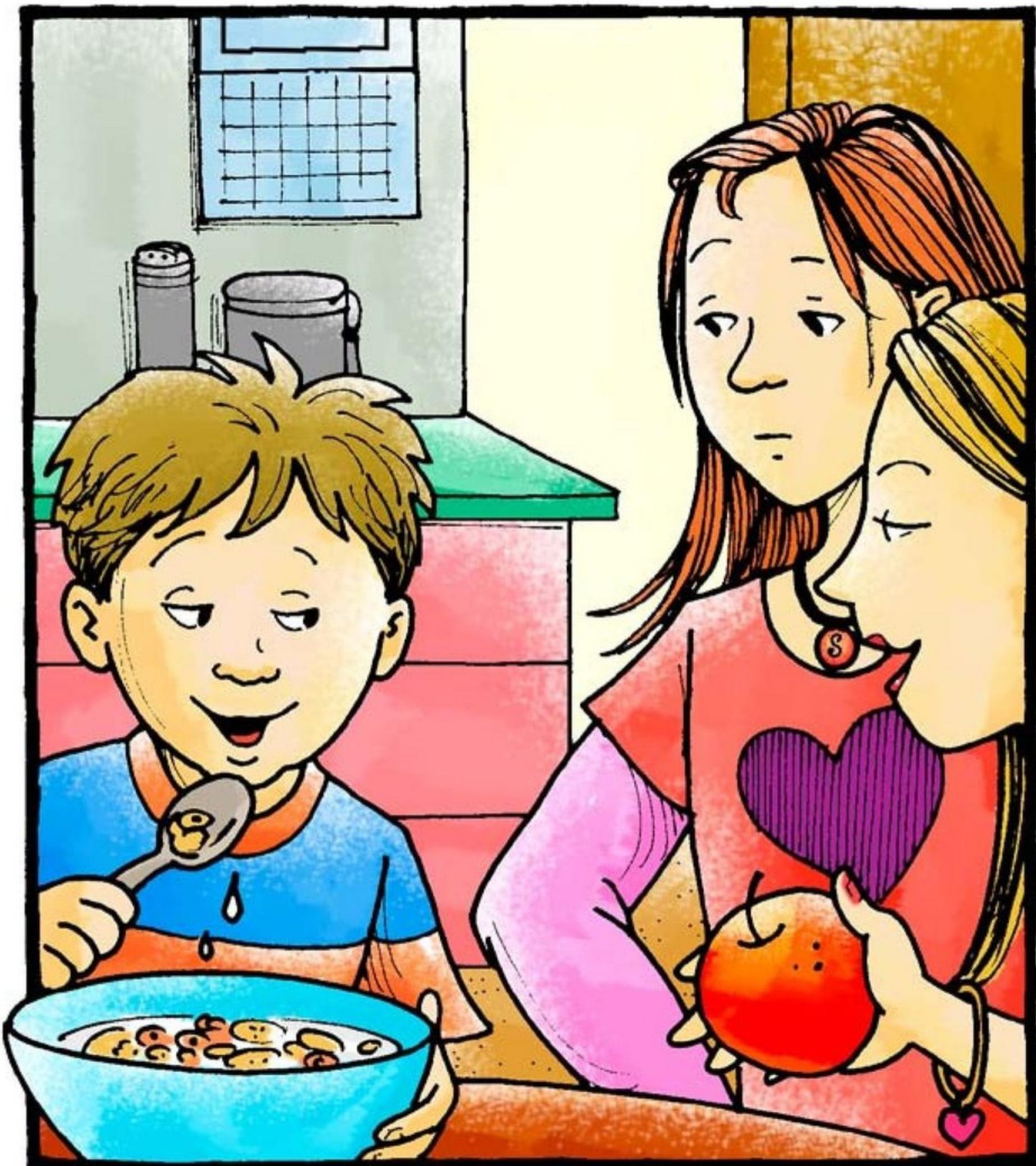


"I'm bored being eleven," Sarah said.

"You've never even been eleven!" interjected her big sister, Kate, entering the room. "I guess you want to be a teenager, just like me."

"I want to be like you about as much as I want to be a snail," Sarah retorted, proud that she could think of a comeback so quickly.

"Well, that's funny because you are as slow as one," said Kate.



Uh-oh. Sarah needed another comeback, quick, and she didn't have one on the tip of her tongue. Her eight-year-old brother, Noah—as usual, at the breakfast table before anyone else—saved her.

"I wish you were both eighteen," Noah said.

"Why?" asked Mom.

"Because then they'd both go away to college, and I'd have Mommy all to myself."

"What about Daddy?" asked Sarah.

"What about me?" Dad said as he walked into the kitchen, opening the newspaper and not looking where he was going.

Noah smirked and "humped," as if to say that everyone knows dads are not nearly the problem that big sisters are.





"Sarah's bored being ten," Mom said to Dad. He looked up and noticed everyone looking at him.

"Well, her birthday is only a few weeks away," he said brightly, as if he were sure he had this one figured out. "She won't have to be ten much longer," he concluded.

"We've been through that," Sarah and Kate said in unison.

"Oh," Dad said, "so what's wrong with being eleven?"

"It's too far away from eighteen," said Noah.

"So what's the big rush to be eighteen?" asked Dad, clearly confused.

"Oh, never mind," Sarah said, getting up from the table.





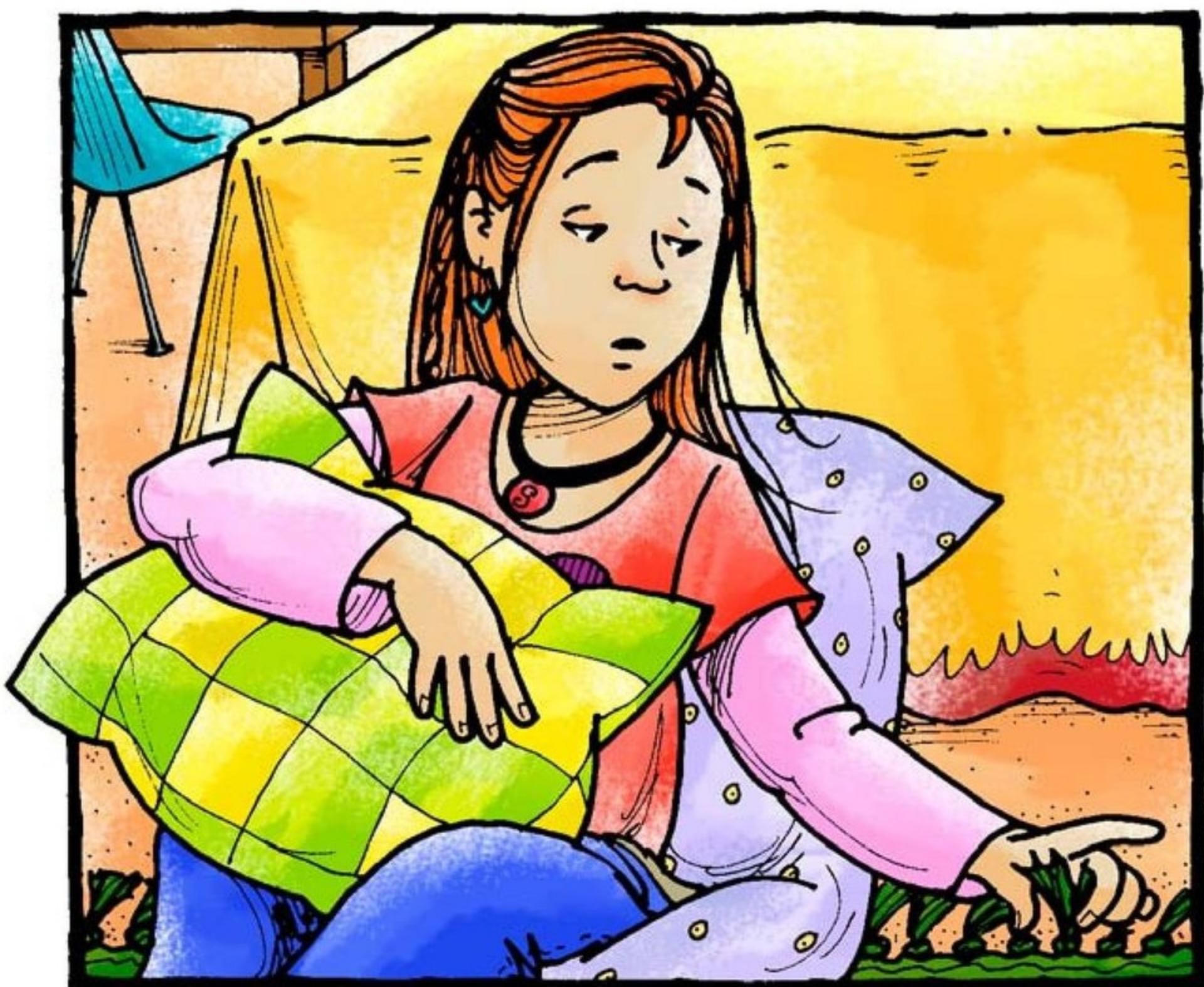
"Aren't you going to eat your breakfast?"  
Mom asked.

"I'm not hungry," Sarah said.

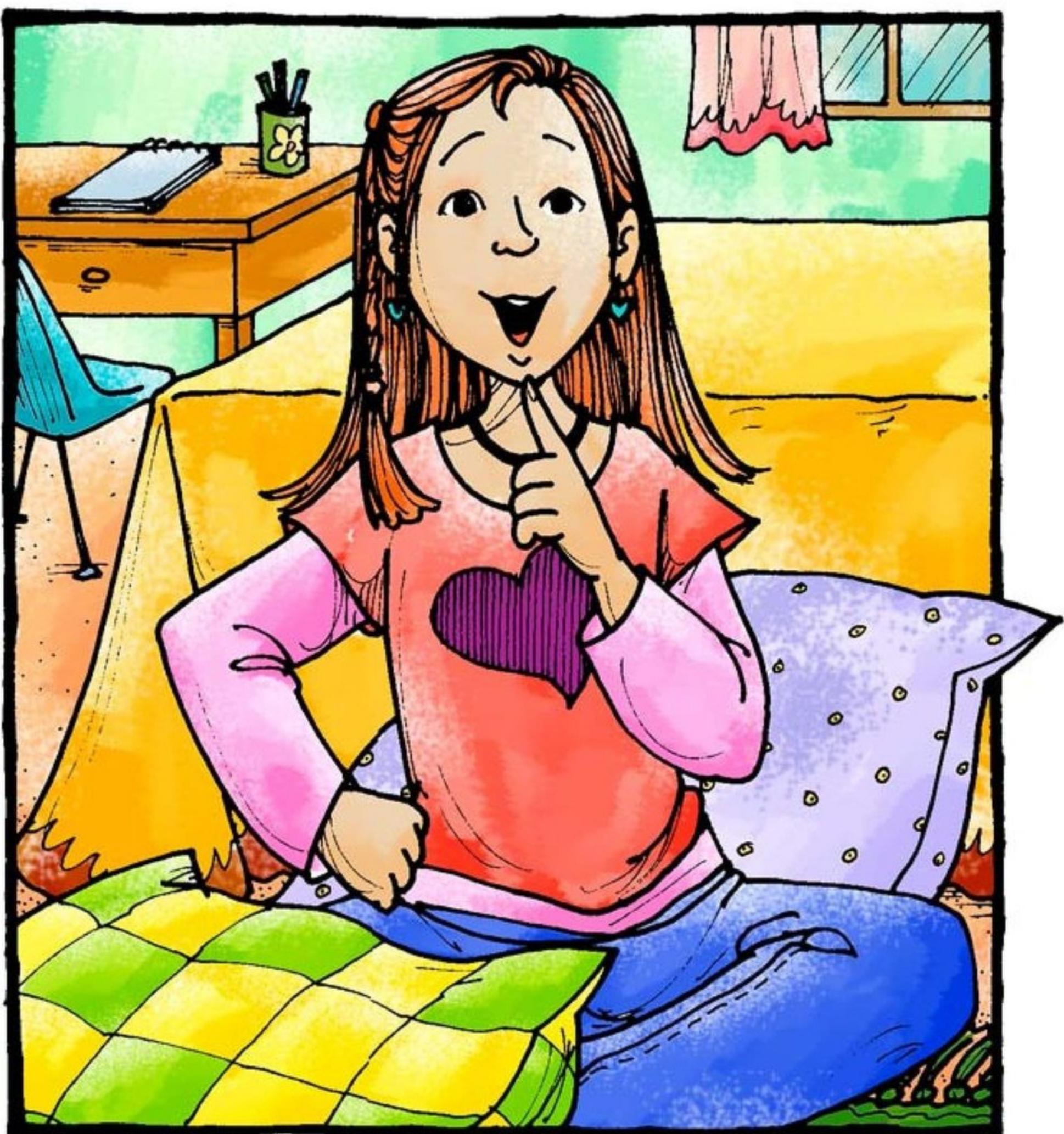
"Right," piped in Kate, her voice dripping with adolescent sarcasm, "she's too busy being bored to be hungry."

"Kate, you're being mean!" said Sarah, storming out of the kitchen. As she left, she heard her father say, for the millionth time, "Kate, be nice to Sarah."

Sarah went to her room. She needed some silence, some time to think. She had to admit that anything that ended with “teen” sounded better than anything that didn’t. “Eleven” isn’t bad, really. At least it has more than one syllable. But then Sarah realized she’d have to spend a whole year being twelve, and twelve sounded just awful. Nothing very exciting could happen to someone called “twelve,” she supposed. She needed to be a teenager, but that was too far away even to think about. It was a dilemma, no doubt about that.



Whenever Sarah had a dilemma, her father would tell her to “weigh the facts.” She was never sure whether he was kidding or thought dilemmas really could be solved by putting facts on some kind of scale. Anyway, she’d never weighed the facts. But then, she’d never solved any dilemmas, either. Maybe there was something to Dad’s advice.



Sarah took out her drawing pad and two colored pencils. She decided a table would be her scale to weigh the facts. The first column was labeled “being a teenager” and was in lavender because it would be wonderful to be a teenager.

The second column was labeled “being eleven” and was in royal blue because the color was full of possibilities.

The whole rest of the page was blank. Sarah started thinking about teenagers and eleven-year-olds so she could decide what to write. She wanted to list all the good things about being a teenager and all the good things about being eleven. She could then compare the good things about each age and see which was better.



The first thing she put in the teenager column was: *can go to mall by myself*. That was a good one because Sarah most definitely could not go to the mall by herself. She kept making entries, and finally the table looked like this:

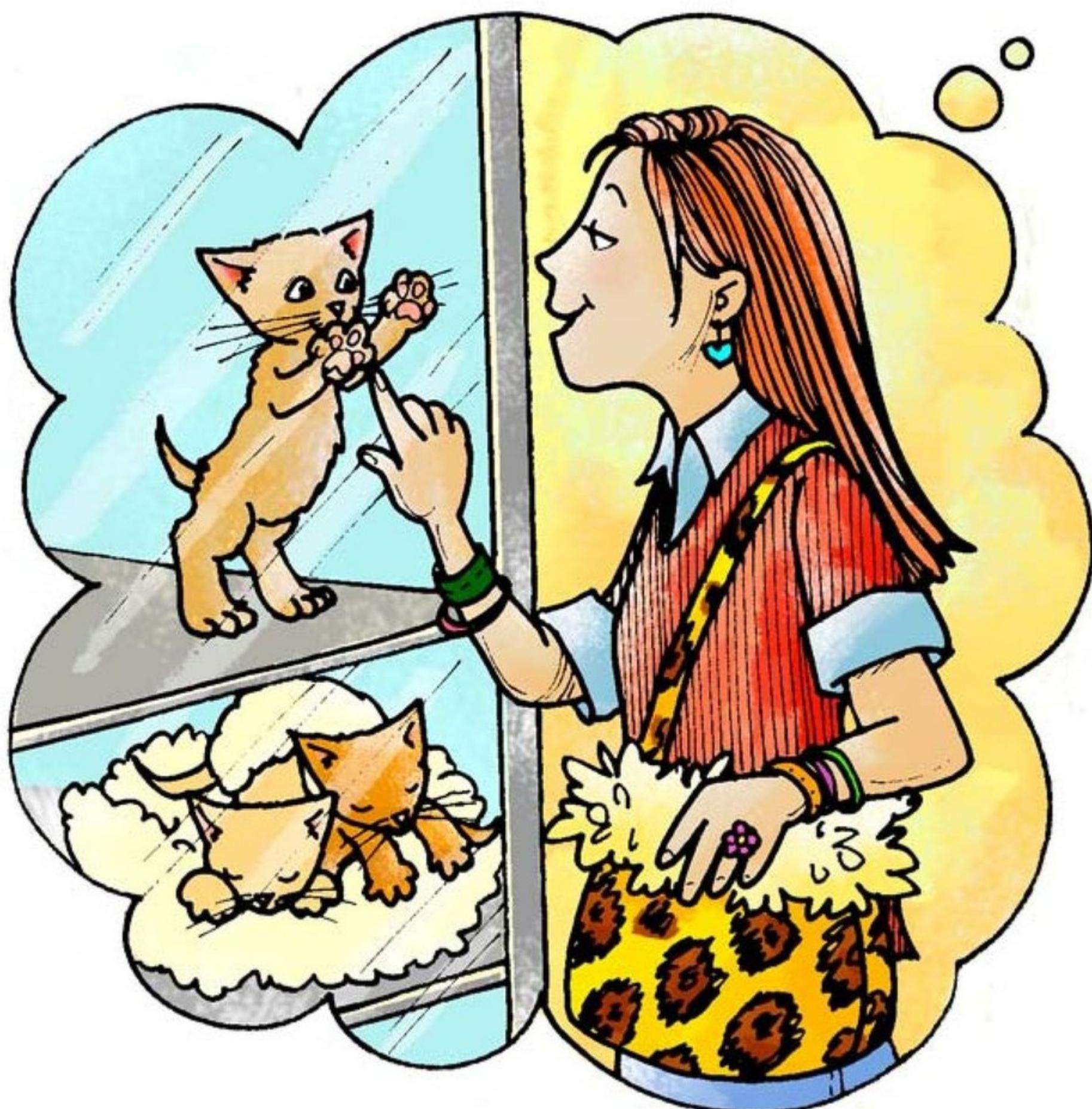


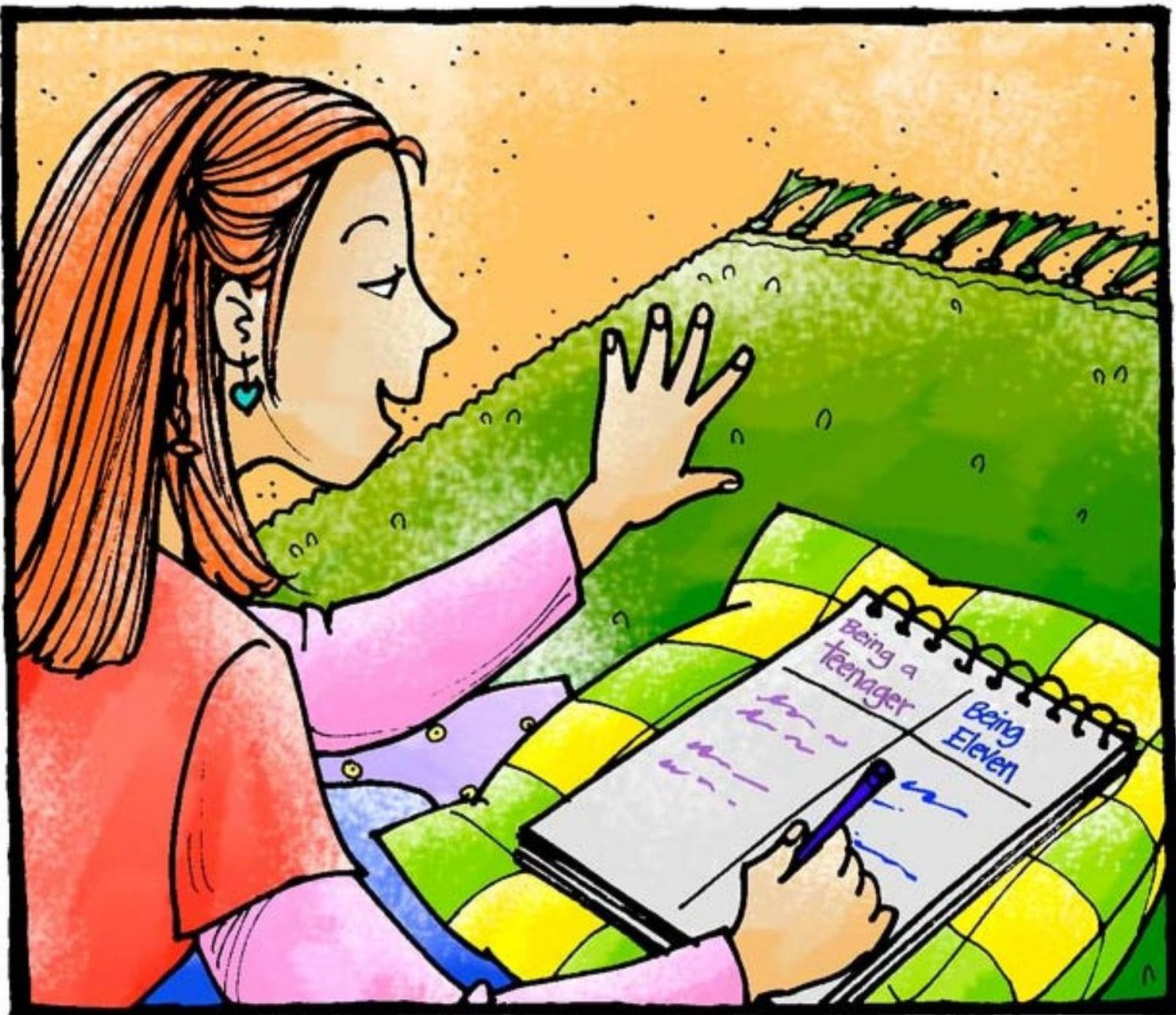


Sarah started to think about what she'd put in the "being eleven" column. Now that she was turning eleven, she would have more responsibility for herself and others.

She and Alika, her best friend, would be able to jog down to the park to play soccer. They could go any time they wanted as long as it was before dark and they told their parents where they were going. Sarah was a good athlete, one of the fastest kids in class, and great at the standing long jump. The park was more fun than the mall. But she had been dying to go to the mall by herself.

It was definitely exciting to be able to go to the mall without your parents or your big sister. The few times that Kate had taken Sarah to the mall, she had made Sarah feel as though she was even younger than ten. Sarah had big dreams about walking into stores as a cool teenager. She would choose how long she stayed at each store, which store to go to next, or to stay another ten minutes just looking at the kittens.



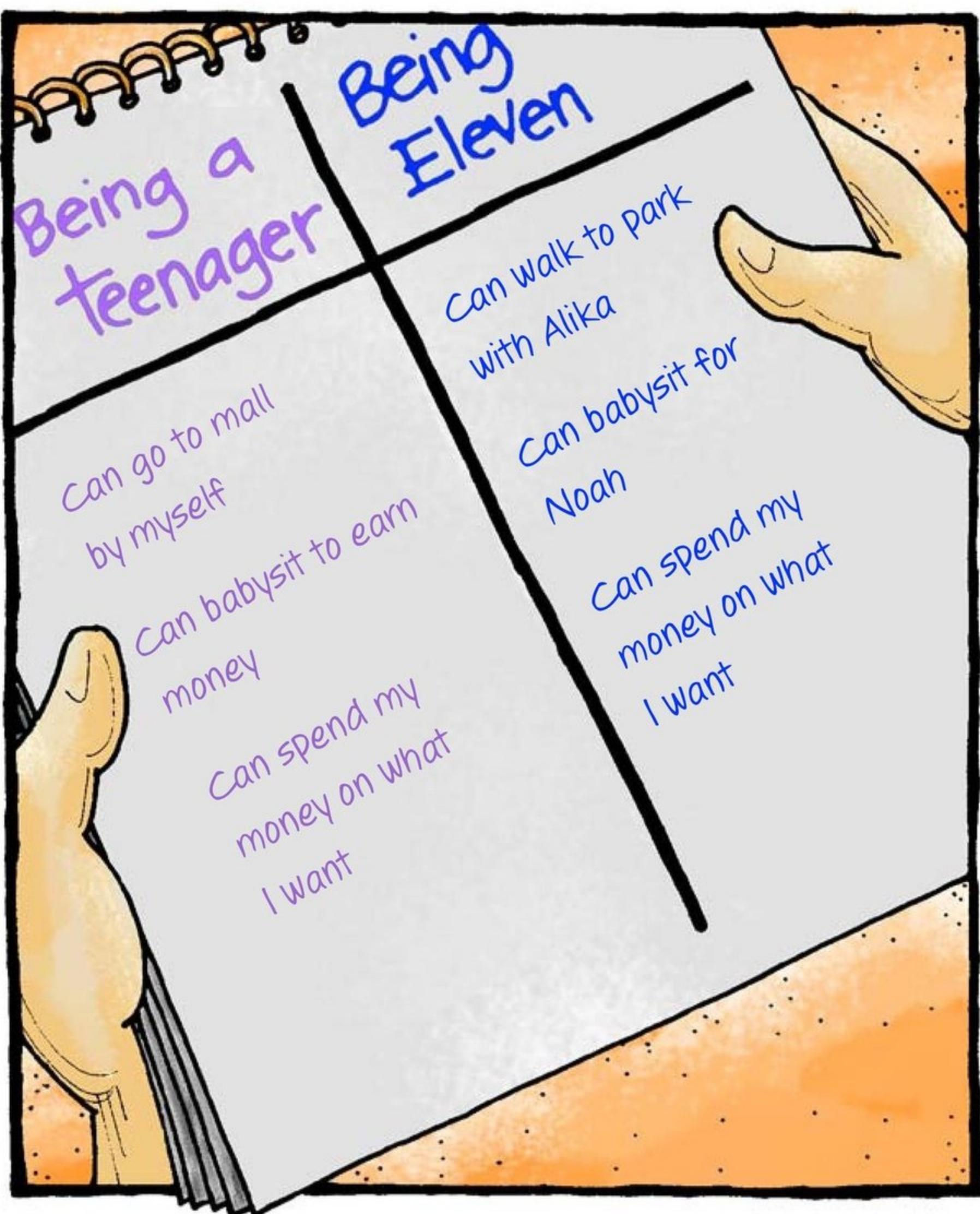


As Sarah looked down her table's columns, she began to realize something. She liked babysitting because she could earn money. Sixteen-year-olds got to babysit all the time. When Sarah turned eleven, her parents said she could babysit Noah and they would pay her. She would still be too young to babysit other people's children, but at least she could babysit Noah. Sarah thought that in that way, she would be close to being sixteen. At eleven she could babysit Noah and earn money and buy the things she wanted, like blue nail polish.



In fact, that was another way she would be like a sixteen-year-old. She could use her own money and buy things she wanted. It wasn't like an allowance, with her parents still saying yes or no to what she bought. She would earn the money so the decisions about what she could spend it on would be hers—just like a sixteen-year-old.

Sarah completed the last line in the table: *can spend my money on what I want*. Then it was there in lavender and blue. At eleven, she would be a whole lot closer to being sixteen than she was at ten. Actually, if you look at it one way, eleven was only five words away from sixteen. That's when it dawned on her.





Eleven! That's what she would be! Like a teenager—responsible, able to earn money, and make her own decisions about how to spend it—but not yet a teenager in years. *Besides*, she thought, *it's more important to act older than to be older*. Her dad was right—when you have a dilemma, all you have to do is weigh the facts.

Sarah knew people might ask her what she meant when she told them she's eleven, but that was no problem. She would tell them, "Oh, someday you'll find out, when you're eleven."

But of course they wouldn't, because no one had ever been eleven before, and probably no one would ever be again!

ElevenTeen  
Level Q Leveled Book  
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