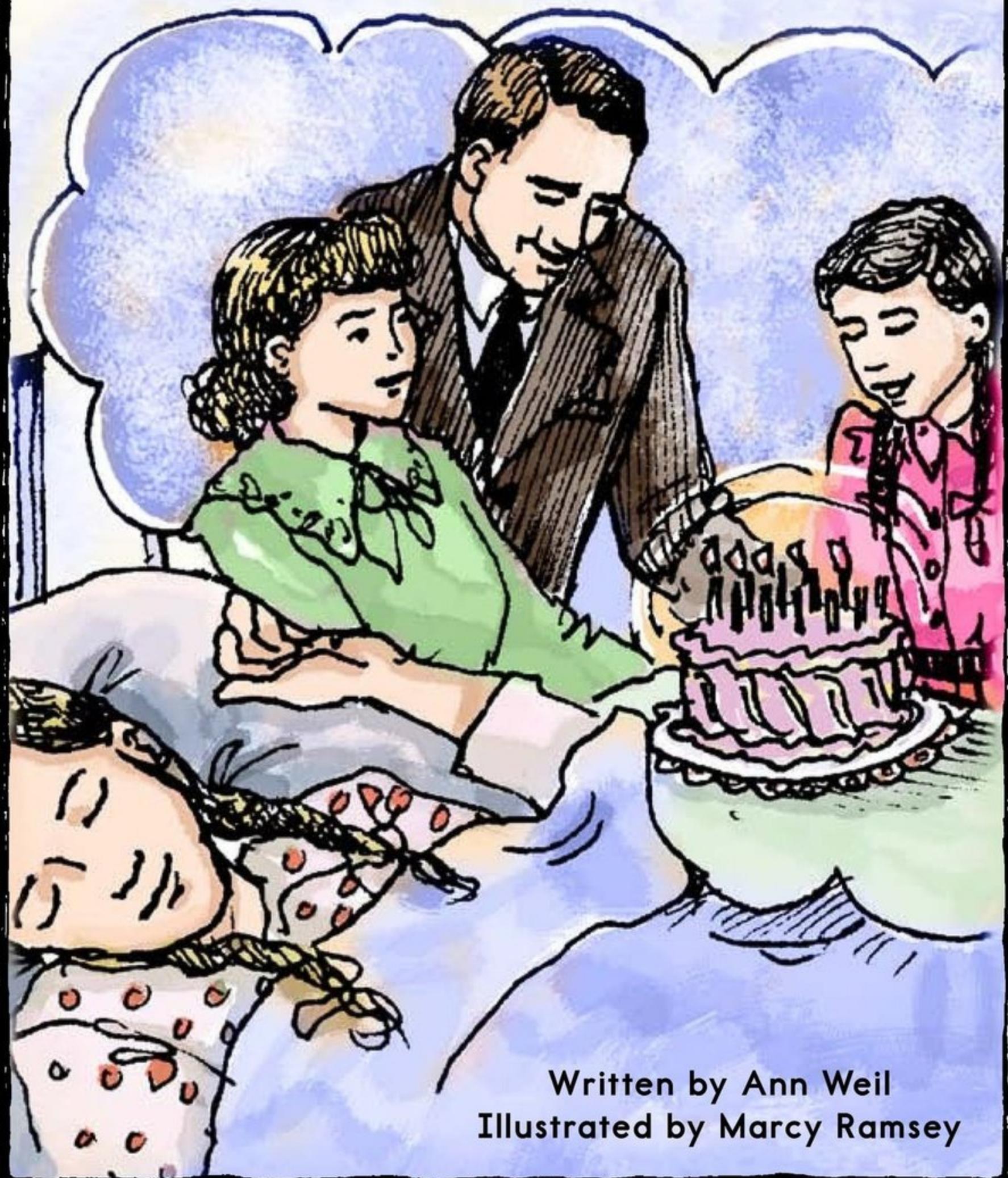


LEVELED Book • T

Alice's Birthday Cake



Written by Ann Weil
Illustrated by Marcy Ramsey

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Chapter One

Alice had a wonderful dream. It was her thirteenth birthday. Her mother had baked her a cake with pink frosting. Her father was handing her a brightly wrapped box with a beautiful bow.

Alice woke up just as she was unwrapping the present. She snapped her eyes shut, hoping to slip back into the lovely dream, but it was too late. She could hear her mother getting ready for work. Alice glanced at the clock on the table next to her bed. It was time for her to get up, too.

Alice's room remained dark as she dressed because heavy **blackout** curtains sealed out the golden sunlight. The country was deep into World War II, and people were afraid that enemy planes would see lights from the city and know where to drop their bombs. Every night, outdoor lights were turned off and indoor lights were hidden. A **warden** patrolled Alice's neighborhood each night. He made sure not even a sliver of light glowed around the edges of drawn blackout curtains.

Alice looked forward to pushing aside her blackout curtains each morning to let sunlight flood her room.

This morning Alice felt cheerful. She might play in the park after school with her friends. But first she had to wake her little brother, Robert, get him dressed, give him breakfast, and walk him to school.



Alice's mother had already left for work by the time Alice and Robert walked into the kitchen. After Alice's father had been **shipped out** to fight the war in Europe, Alice's mother took a job working at a factory that made parts for ships. Like many women, she held a job once done by a man who had been shipped out like Alice's father. America needed new ships to win the war, and it was up to the women to work eight- to twelve-hour shifts six or seven days a week to keep the factories running.



Alice was proud of the **sacrifices** her parents made for the war effort. But she missed having breakfast with her mother. She missed her father, too.

"You look sad," said Robert. He had a mouthful of cereal and milk dribbling from his chin. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing," Alice lied as she absently wiped her brother's face with a napkin. Robert was right. Alice was feeling sad. Her thirteenth birthday was tomorrow. In the past, Alice looked forward to her birthdays, but this year was different. Her father usually would wake her up by belting out the song *Happy Birthday to You*. It always made her laugh. "Unlucky thirteen," Alice said to herself as she helped Robert tie his shoes.



Chapter Two

Since Alice's mother worked long hours at the factory, Alice did more chores around the house. Most days Alice did not mind the extra **responsibility**, she felt good being able to help out. Today the one chore she had to do—grocery shopping—made Alice want to groan with the effort it would take. Alice was not in the mood to travel from store to store to find all the items on the shopping list her mother had left along with money and their **ration book**.



Each family had a ration book with stamps for certain kinds of food. Because of the war, the government rationed food to make sure there was enough for everyone when supplies were limited. Stores ran out of the most popular items, such as coffee and **canned goods**. Alice had to match the right stamps from her ration book with the food on her mother's list. Shopping could take a long time.

Alice saw milk on the list and was not looking forward to another marathon shopping trip. Milk could be difficult to find. Once there was no milk, so they had to eat their cereal with water instead.

Alice washed dishes before she and Robert left for school. Tomorrow was Alice's birthday, but she knew there wasn't going to be a party. Alice saw there were no ration stamps left for sugar, butter, or eggs. Her mother couldn't bake a cake with just flour. Alice and Robert walked to school in silence.





Right after school, Alice had to go grocery shopping. She waved bye to her friends as she grabbed Robert's hand. Her friends had been whispering and quickly stopped when they saw Alice. Alice wondered if they were talking about her. She hadn't told them it would be her birthday tomorrow. What was the use? No cake, no party, so no reason to tell her friends. Alice wondered if that's what they were whispering about. Maybe they knew it was her birthday, and they were mad they hadn't been invited to a party.

Alice walked to Main Street, her mood darker than the blackout curtains in her room. It took three stores before she found everything on the list. Robert had been quiet. He didn't even complain that the stores did not have his favorite canned peaches. She was thankful.

On the walk home, Alice and Robert passed an elderly couple sitting on their front porch. Alice saw a blue star in their window. A blue star meant that a man from that family was a soldier away at war. A gold star meant that the soldier had been killed. Alice and Robert passed many blue stars. Alice thought of the blue star in their window at home and wished that her father was home safe.

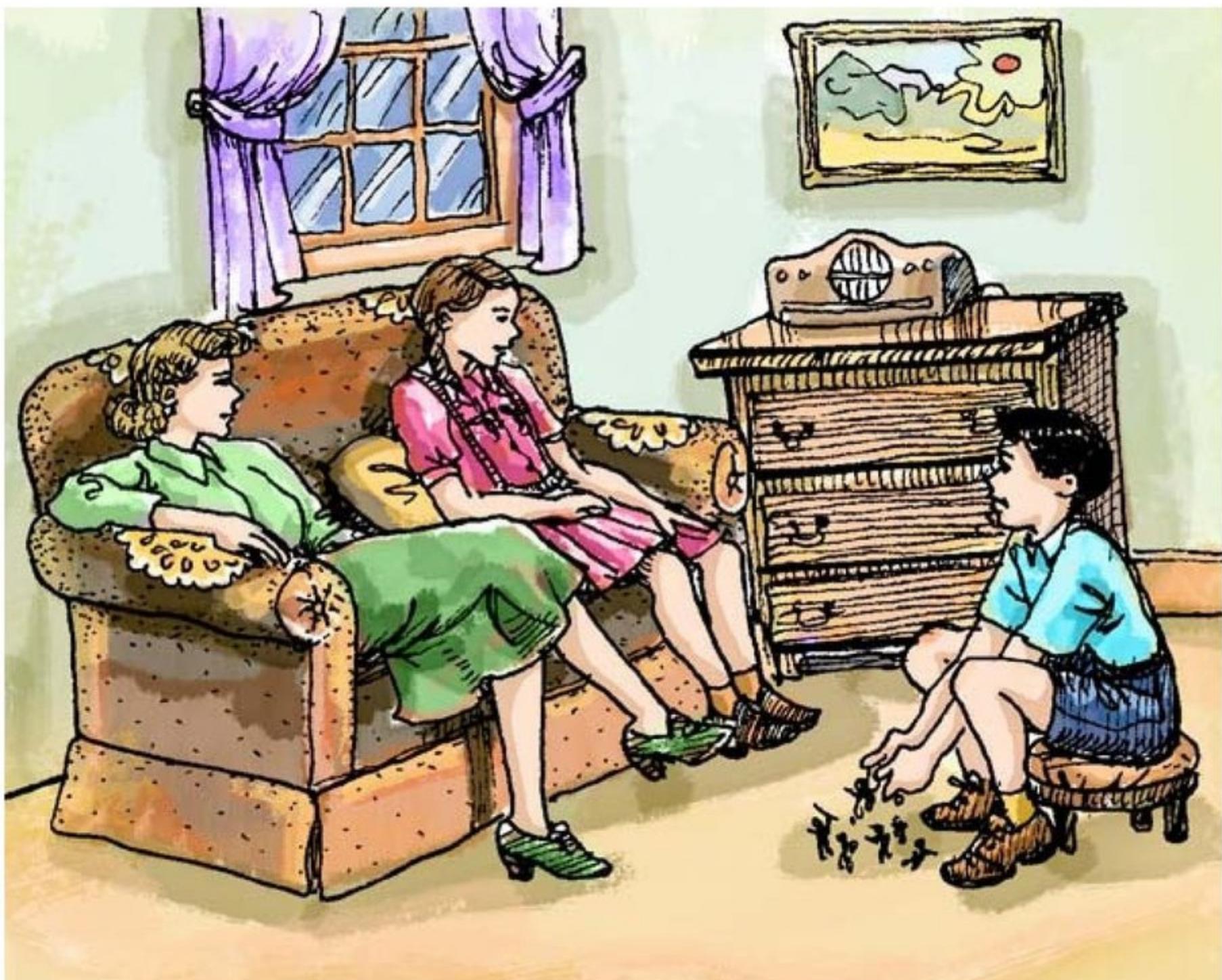


Chapter Three

Alice's mother was always tired when she got home from work in the evening. Alice tried to have dinner ready so her mother could enjoy a bath before they sat down together to eat.

At dinner, Robert told them about how he and his friends had won the **scrap** drive. They had collected more bits of metal and tin foil than any other team. The metal was used to make materials for the war effort.





After dinner, Robert played with his toy soldiers as they all listened to the radio, hoping for good news about the war. "When is father coming home?" Robert asked.

"Soon, dear," said Mother in a soft voice. Alice knew that her mother missed their father as much as she did. Alice would not complain about her day to her mother. She knew birthdays were small when compared to helping the war effort, but Alice, afraid her disappointment would show, went to bed early. Upstairs, she cried herself to sleep.



Chapter Four

To Alice's great surprise, she woke the next morning to the sound of singing. Her mother and brother were standing next to her bed, belting out *Happy Birthday to You* in their loudest voices just as her father would have. At first, Alice thought she was dreaming. But it was really happening.

"You didn't forget!" Alice said happily, sitting up in bed.

"Of course not," said her mother. She gave Alice a big birthday hug.

It was Saturday. Alice's mother did not have to work this weekend, so they all ate their cereal together. Alice was much happier that today was her thirteenth birthday. Her blackout curtains no longer reflected her mood.

After breakfast, Mother gave Alice some money so she and Robert could go to the movies. "It's a double feature," Alice's mother said. "Have fun!"





Alice and Robert walked to the movie theater. Alice would rather have had a party, but she was happy her mother and brother remembered she turned thirteen today. Alice looked for her friends in the line of people buying tickets, but they were not there. “That’s strange,” she said to herself. Usually her friends went to the movies on Saturdays. Alice wondered if they were having fun without her. If only I was having a birthday party, she thought sadly. She bought two tickets and led her brother inside.

Chapter Five

As they left the movie theater, Robert said, "Hurry, let's run home."

The bright sun hurt Alice's eyes after being so long in the dark theater. "What's the big rush?" said Alice. She had enjoyed the movie, but she still felt **disappointed** that she wasn't going to have a party. Alice knew they did not have the ration stamps for a cake, but a party would have been nice. Alice thought about looking for her friends, but then she wondered if they were still her friends after all. Robert had started to run home already, so Alice jogged to catch up to him.



Once home, Robert had left the front door hanging open. Alice walked in and closed the door behind her. The house seemed strangely silent. Where was Robert? Where was her mother? Alice felt scared. The door to the dining room was closed. Alice started to push it open. "Hello! Anybody here?" she called out in a curious voice.

"Surprise!"

Alice slowly blinked her eyes as if what she saw would disappear. All her friends were standing around the dining table. On the table was a big cake with pink frosting. Alice's friends sang *Happy Birthday to You*.



“But . . . how . . . I didn’t think . . .” Alice could barely speak, she was so happy.

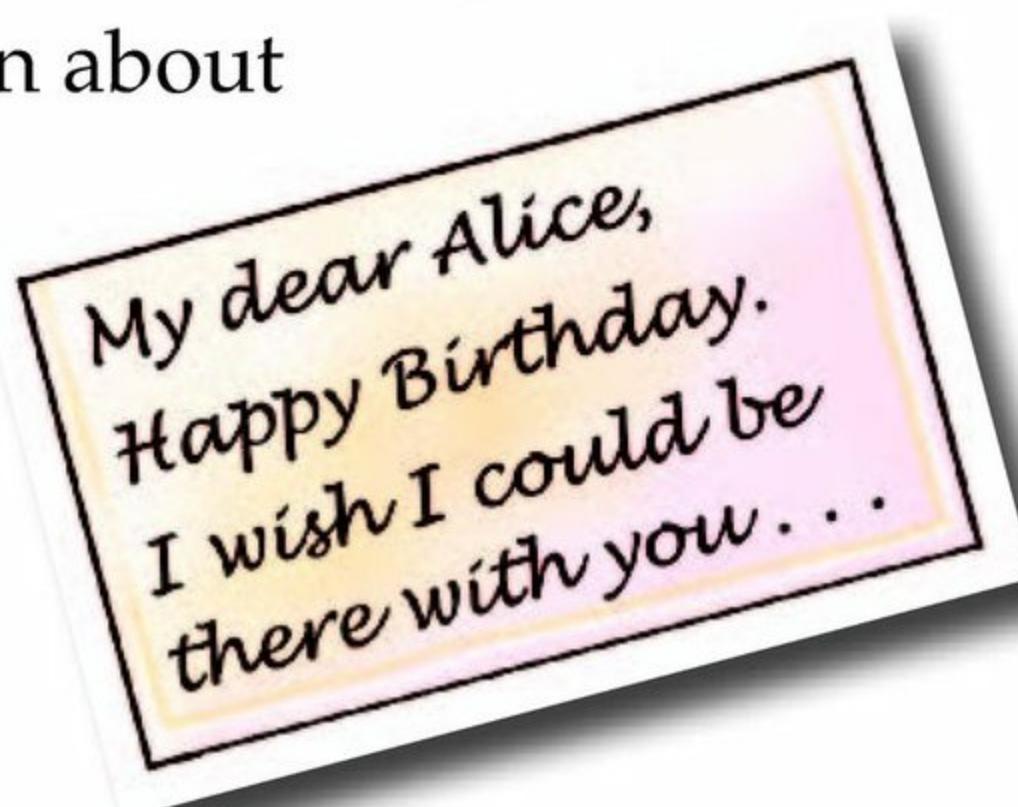
“I saved our ration stamps so I could buy enough butter, eggs, and sugar for your cake,” explained Alice’s mother. “Your friends’ families helped, too.”

“We thought you might have guessed what all the whispering was about,” said Alice’s friend Elizabeth. “We were talking about which stamps we still needed for your cake.”

Alice saw a letter next to the cake. “What’s this?” she asked her mother.

“Read it,” her mother suggested.

Alice read the letter. It was a birthday card from her father. He was safe. Alice was wrong when she thought that turning thirteen was unlucky. She felt awful for thinking everyone had forgotten about her. All her friends and family loved her very much and had made turning thirteen truly special.



Glossary

blackout	a time when lights have to be turned off or kept from being seen, such as during an air raid (p. 5)
canned goods	food that is sealed in tin cans to keep it from spoiling (p. 8)
disappointed	the feeling of not achieving something that you wanted (p. 17)
ration book	a book of stamps given by the government that limits the amount of food a person could buy (p. 8)
responsibility	something of importance that a person takes charge of (p. 8)
sacrifices	actions or objects unselfishly given to help other people or a cause (p. 7)
scrap	material, like metal, that is left over from a project (p. 12)
shipped out	when a military person travels away from home, sometimes to fight in a war (p. 6)
warden	somebody whose job it is to look out for an event or for people (p. 5)

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Level T Leveled Book
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