

Dear Sam,

I didn't
 still don't
 and why you
 always do the
 right thing, so
 this must be
 right too. Things
 like Grandpa
 leaving like Dad did. It
 the best brother in the world.

GAYLE ROSENGREN

ALSO BY GAYLE ROSENGREN

What the Moon Said

OceanofPDF.com

COLD WAR

on MAPLEWOOD STREET

GAYLE ROSENGREN

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To Pete, forever alive in my heart, and Don, who brought the laughter back

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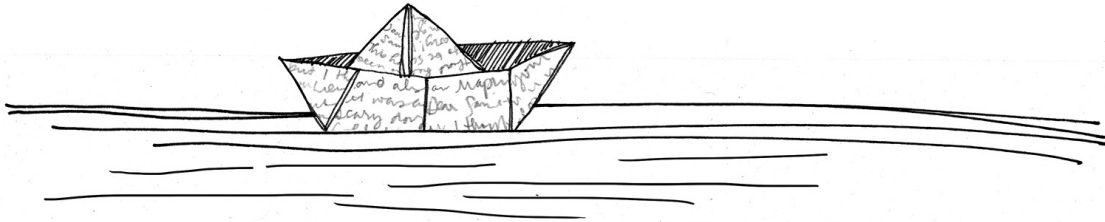
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CHAPTER 1

A Scary Phone Call

October 22, 1962

JOANNA WAS SINGING ALONG WITH ELVIS PRESLEY

AND dancing her empty cereal bowl across the kitchen when the telephone rang. Startled, she dropped the bowl. Luckily she had just reached the sink. Even luckier, the bowl didn't shatter when it struck the porcelain with a loud clunk.

Still, Joanna frowned and her heart continued beating faster than usual. Hardly anyone ever called so early. Except for when it was bad news, like when Grandma called to tell them Grandpa was in the hospital.

Joanna turned down the volume on the radio Sam had sent her and lifted the receiver from the phone on the wall. "Hello?" she said.

No one answered.

"Hello?" She heard a quick breath and then a click as the caller hung up.

Joanna slammed the receiver onto its hook and backed away. She hated hang-ups. Mom would say it was just a wrong number, but Joanna had read in one of her mystery books that burglars sometimes call ahead to make sure no one is home before they break in. Hang-ups made her think there was someone who *wanted* to break in. And that made her think about how easy that would be. They lived in a basement apartment after all. A burglar could just kneel down, smash a window, and climb in easy as pie. Joanna shivered, glad it was time to leave for school.

She patted the small white dog at her feet. "Don't worry, Dixie. I answered the phone, so no burglars are going to come. You're safe." Dixie looked up with trusting eyes and wagged her crooked tail. She didn't look a bit worried.

Joanna threw on her jacket, scooped up her books, and hurried out of the apartment. She tested the door to make sure it was locked. Then she

bounded up the concrete steps to the sidewalk where Pamela Waterman should have been waiting for her but wasn't. Joanna sighed.

Pamela lived on the third floor of their apartment building and they'd been best friends since before kindergarten. Pamela was good at keeping secrets and loved dogs and horses and mystery books as much as Joanna did. But Pamela wasn't always good at being on time.

Waiting for Pamela never used to bother Joanna. She'd imagine herself on a horse, racing across open fields, sailing over fences. Or she'd try to solve the mystery in whichever book she was reading. And if it was cold or rainy, she'd just climb the front steps, push open the door, and wait inside the hallway, where it was warm and dry. But that was before their new first-floor neighbor moved in.

When the girls first saw the label on the mailbox, they'd thought it said "Strange 1." Pamela had giggled. A closer look revealed that the name was spelled "S-t-r-e-n-g-e," but Joanna couldn't laugh along with Pamela at their mistake.

"She really *is* strange," Joanna had insisted. "You didn't see the little blond girl come running out of her apartment crying. I did. She went up to the door with a carton of Girl Scout Cookies while I was walking Dixie. And a couple minutes later she came running out so fast, she even left her cookies behind!"

"What could Mrs. Streng have done?" Pamela had scoffed. "She's ancient."

Joanna had to admit that the old woman didn't look strong enough to hurt a fly. But she knew what she'd seen. And she knew there was something evil about Mrs. Streng. It wasn't just that she had witchy wild white hair and a nearly all-black cat. It was the way the old woman stared at her sometimes when Joanna was outside. Ugh! It gave her the creeps.

Joanna risked a quick sideways glance up at the window. The curtains were closed. Her shoulders sagged in relief.

At the same moment, the front door swung open and Pamela appeared. "Sorry." She galloped down the steps. "I started to call you to tell you I was going to be late, but then Marie finally came out of the bathroom, so I just hung up and ran for it."

"Oh! That was *you*! I thought—" But Joanna changed what she was about to say. "I wondered who was calling so early."

No need to tell Pamela she'd been scared it was a burglar. Instead, Joanna listened to Pamela explain how Marie had hogged the bathroom so long that Pamela had only five minutes to get ready.

Joanna made a sympathetic noise. Marie was gorgeous, the star of every play at the high school, but she wasn't a very nice big sister. Not like Sam, who'd always been a terrific big brother.

Joanna's throat tightened. If only Sam hadn't joined the navy. If only he had stayed home with Joanna and Mom. A while back he'd given Joanna his Duncan—the best yo-yo there was—and taught her to do tricks like Walk the Dog and Rock the Baby and Around the World. But Joanna only went Around the World with her yo-yo; Sam was doing it for real.

Thinking of him made her eyes sting. Joanna blinked hard and forced her attention back to Pamela. "Marie can be a brat, that's for sure," she said. "But your mom and dad are great."

Pamela shrugged. "They're okay, I guess."

Mr. and Mrs. Waterman were a lot better than "okay," but Joanna didn't argue. Pamela didn't realize how lucky she was to have a fun mom who was home all the time, and a nice dad, too.

Mr. Waterman was a responsible man. Joanna's dad—as Mom said often enough—was *not*. He'd left their family when Joanna was only four. She barely remembered what he looked like. And since he was always behind on the child support money he was supposed to send, Mom had to work a lot. And when she wasn't working, she was usually tired, or worried about money, or both. If only Joanna's father were responsible, like Mr. Waterman, their lives would be very different.

Van Buren Elementary School was only two blocks away, so it wasn't long before they heard shouts and laughter from kids playing tag and jumping rope and climbing on the jungle gym. But playing was for little kids.

The older girls—girls in sixth grade and up—formed little huddles. They talked and giggled and whispered about movie stars and the boys in their class and sometimes—when they could get their hands on a copy—the stories in *True Romance* magazine.

The girls in Joanna's class usually huddled around Sherry Bellano.

It wasn't just because Sherry was pretty that the other girls circled her like planets around a sun. It was the knack she had of always knowing what

was “in” before anyone else. For example, that day Sherry’s pink-polished fingernails were all an inch long! Joanna’s mouth fell open. The other girls gasped, and Debbie Rickers stopped chomping on her bubble gum long enough to ask, “How’d you grow them so *fast*?”

“I bought them at Woolworths,” Sherry said with a giggle. “They’re made out of plastic. You just glue ’em on.” She fluttered her fingers in the air like pink butterflies.

They looked so cool, Joanna knew that in a day or two half of the other girls would be wearing fake nails, too. So would she, if she had the money to buy them.

The bell rang and everyone swarmed into the building. Hundreds of feet pounded up the stairs. On the third floor, Joanna said good-bye to Pamela outside of Miss Zolanski’s classroom. Here was another example of Pamela’s luck.

Miss Zolanski was young and pretty, wore her hair like First Lady Jackie Kennedy, and didn’t believe in homework. Joanna’s teacher, Mr. Egan, was old and dandruffy, wore ugly ties, and believed the more homework the better. The only good thing about being in Mr. Egan’s class was Theo Jaegerson.

Joanna had liked Theo from the day he appeared as a new boy in her class last spring. Theo had wavy blond hair and Lake Michigan–blue eyes. He was smart, and he was nice. She’d thought he couldn’t be more perfect. And then she overheard him talking about riding his horse in Lincoln Park. His very own horse! From then on, Joanna dreamed of Theo inviting her to go riding with him.

The problem was Theo sat on the other side of the classroom this year. And when they weren’t at their desks, he was always surrounded by other boys. So they hardly ever had a chance to talk to each other. That was why Joanna was desperate to go to the party that Sherry was having on Saturday night—the first boy-girl party in their class.

At a party, it would be easy for Joanna to “accidentally” find herself beside Theo and say, “Hi. Nice party, huh? Say, someone said you have a horse. Do you really?” Then she could tell him about the pretty black mare she’d ridden when Sam took her riding on her birthday. And maybe Theo’d ask her to dance. *Maybe* they’d become boyfriend and girlfriend!

Of course, if Mom had her way, there'd be no party for Joanna. Mom thought twelve was too young to go to a party with boys, at night. But there were five days yet 'til the party. Joanna was certain she could change her mother's mind in that amount of time.

Joanna entered her classroom and went to hang up her jacket. Her steps quickened when she saw Theo ahead, just outside of the cloakroom. He had a fistful of red licorice whips and he was dealing them out like playing cards to Billy, Steven, Richard—and *Joanna!*

"Th-thanks," she stammered.

Theo grinned. She loved the fact that he had just one dimple, in his right cheek. Somehow it was even cuter than if he'd had two.

The rest of Joanna's day passed in a happy red licorice glow that even a surprise quiz on decimals couldn't dim.

"So maybe he likes me, too," Joanna confided to Pamela on their way home that afternoon, orange and gold leaves raining down on their heads with each gust of wind.

"You've just *got* to go to Sherry's party now!" Pamela said.

"I'll talk Mom into it somehow," Joanna vowed.

At their apartment building, Pamela made a face. "I have to go to the dentist today." Then she added, "But you're gonna die tomorrow when you see what I found hidden in the pocket of Marie's robe this morning."

"What?" Joanna begged. "Tell me!"

Pamela made a zipping motion over her lips and skipped up the stairs to the building's entrance.

"You're mean!" Joanna called. But she laughed as she trotted downstairs to the basement. Maybe Pamela had found Marie's diary again!

The house key hung on a chain around Joanna's neck. As she fished it from under her blouse, Dixie started to whimper on the other side of the door. "Calm down," she called. "I'm coming." But despite the whimpers, Joanna took an extra moment to check the mailbox that hung on the brick wall next to the door.

Probably there wouldn't be another letter from Sam yet. But there *could* be. She reached inside. Her fingers brushed metal and air, but no mail. Not even a bill. She let the lid bang shut.

Joanna's disappointment couldn't last long, though. Not when Dixie was so happy to see her when she opened the door. The little dog yelped and

danced and wagged around Joanna's ankles.

"You're the best, the sweetest, most wonderful dog in the world," Joanna crooned as she hugged her dog. Dixie wiggled and whimpered that she loved Joanna, too.

Joanna snapped on Dixie's leash and took her for a walk. She laughed when Dixie chased and pounced on blowing leaves as if they were wild things and she was a fierce huntress. And she and Dixie both stopped to sniff at the air when the tangy smell of burning leaves wafted to them on a breeze. Jack-o'-lanterns leered at them from porch rails and steps. And always somewhere in the background was the strumming of a rake across a lawn. Autumn was everywhere.

They ran most of the way home. Dixie's paws flew across the sidewalk, her tiny toenails making scratching noises on the concrete. She ran so fast that Joanna couldn't keep up and finally had to slow back down to a walk a few houses from their building to catch her breath and ease the stitch in her side. Dixie could have kept going and going.

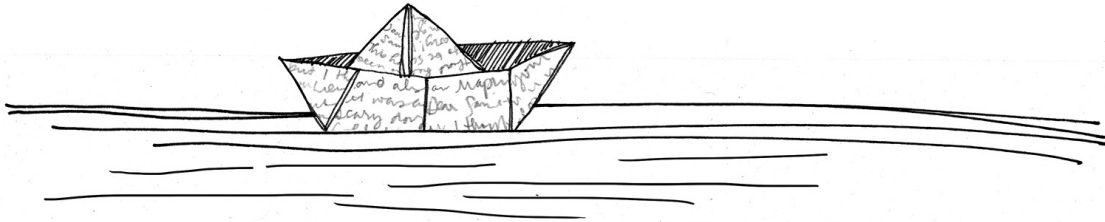
Just before she started down the steps to their apartment, a crawly feeling on the back of her neck made Joanna look up. Mrs. Strenge stood at the window. Her beady eyes stared from a scrawny face surrounded by hair sticking out in all directions, like the Bride of Frankenstein. Her fat black cat glowered down from the windowsill beside her.

Joanna's heart gave a lurch and thudded in her ears as she stared back at Mrs. Strenge, unable to look away. Until the old woman raised a bony hand and gestured, *come*.

Just like Dracula! He hypnotized his victims with his stare, and then he reached out his hand and called to them in his spooky Transylvania voice, "*Come to me . . .*"

But he was make-believe and Mrs. Strenge was *real*.

Joanna tore her eyes from the window and listened at last to what her brain was screaming. She ran.



CHAPTER 2

Eyes in the Window

JOANNA BOLTED DOWN THE STAIRS WITH DIXIE AS IF

Dracula, the Bride of Frankenstein, and Mrs. Strengé were all just inches behind them. Long after she'd slammed and locked the door, and Dixie was dozing under the table at her feet, Joanna kept feeling the hairs on the back of her neck prickle. She'd whirl around to make sure the old woman wasn't sneaking up behind her.

Each time she looked and saw no one, she felt relieved and then embarrassed. How could Mrs. Strengé get in? The door was locked. She was being silly. Still, the old woman had done something to that girl to make her cry and run away. What was it? The question haunted Joanna.

She rubbed Dixie's side gently with the toe of one loafer. Thank goodness Sam had been able to talk Mom into letting Joanna have a dog. Without Dixie, Joanna would really truly be all alone, and just the thought made her shiver again.

She bit her lip. What was happening to her? Sure, Mrs. Strengé was creepy, but why was she letting the old woman get to her this way? She'd always thought of herself as brave. She'd zoomed up and down on the highest roller coasters at Riverview Park with Sam. And she wasn't afraid of thunderstorms or spooky movies like Pamela. But lately things bothered her that never had before, like the phone hang-up that morning, and weird noises after dark.

A low growl from Dixie startled Joanna. She looked up to where Dixie was staring. Two yellow eyes glittered back at her from the darkness that had settled outside the window. Her heart stopped. Dixie barked. The eyes disappeared.

Joanna sprang up and yanked the skimpy curtains closer together. The eyes had belonged to Mrs. Strengé's cat. Joanna heard the old woman call him sometimes in a creaky wail: "Haaaar-veeeey . . . Haaaar-veeeey."

Stupid cat. He was probably sniffing around the garbage cans again, looking for scraps of food.

He'd nearly given Joanna a heart attack! She patted Dixie. "Good girl," she said. "Good, *good* girl."

Dixie wagged her tail. "I'll bet you're hungry," Joanna said. "Do you want your supper?"

Dixie knew the words *hungry* and *supper*, and scampered right over to the pantry door. She gave a little yip and tap-danced excitedly while Joanna retrieved the bag of dog kibble and poured some into her dish.

While Dixie happily crunched away, Joanna took her math book into the living room and turned on the television—something Mom would never have allowed if she were home. But Mom wasn't home, and Joanna refused to feel guilty. Once the sun went down—as it did earlier and earlier these days—the darkness seemed to press against the windows like that darned cat. Knowing that anyone could just crouch down and peer in between a tiny gap in the curtains was scary. Faces and voices, even if they were on the TV, made Joanna feel less alone.

Half an hour later, she finished her last decimal problem and slapped her book shut. She went to the kitchen and heated tomato soup in a pot on the stove. Thumps sounded overhead. One, two, three, four. Quiet. Then one, two, three, four again. Like a code! Was someone being held captive upstairs and signaling for help? The thumps ceased. Now there was a rattling noise like something made of metal was being dragged across the floor. Joanna gulped. Could it be—*chains*?

The soup had begun to boil. She turned off the burner and gave it a quick stir. Then she poured some into a bowl and crumbled crackers on top. During all of this she listened carefully, but it was quiet upstairs. Whatever had been happening had stopped, and before it could start again, Joanna carried her soup carefully to the living room. Another thing Mom wouldn't have allowed if she'd been home.

A rerun of *Broken Arrow* would be coming on in a minute. But first was a commercial with a toothbrush singing, "You'll wonder where the yellow went, when you brush your teeth with Pepsodent."

The music for *Broken Arrow* should have come next. Instead, a voice announced an important message from the president of the United States and the presidential seal appeared. Joanna groaned. She hated speeches.

And she especially wasn't interested in anything President Kennedy had to say. If it weren't for him, Sam would still be home.

"Ask not what your country can do for you," John F. Kennedy had said in his inauguration speech, which Sam had insisted Joanna listen to. "Ask what you can do for your country." Right after that, Sam started talking about how great it would be to join the army or the navy and travel around the world. See new places. Learn new things. Maybe even go to college on the GI Bill when he came home again.

"You can't leave," Joanna had protested. "You promised."

He'd looked startled. He'd bitten his lip as if maybe, until she reminded him, he really had forgotten the promise he'd made her on the day their father had left.

She'd only been four, but she remembered it clear as anything.

She remembered how Mom kept clutching at Dad's arm as he flung shirts and socks and pants into a big brown suitcase. And how he kept shrugging her off, pulling free to pack even faster. But she just clung tighter and cried. How he swore and told her she was upsetting Joanna and Sam, and how she'd laugh-shrieked, "Me? *I'm* not the one that's leaving." And how he'd sighed and snapped the suitcase shut and hefted it off the bed.

Mom had grabbed him one last time, sobbing, "Don't do this, Rick—"

He'd jerked away so hard, she'd fallen onto the bed. She just lay there after that, crying and crying and crying. Joanna had never been so scared. She'd never seen her father so red-faced or looking so grim. She'd never seen him hurt her mother. She'd never seen her mother cry. Over and over again in her mind, she saw her father jerking away from Mom, and her falling onto the bed. She heard Mom crying and crying, even after Sam took her hand and led her to his room, closed the door, and turned on his record player really loud. She was frightened, so she cried and cried, too.

Sam had put his arms around her. "Sssshhhh. It's going to be okay, Jo. Don't cry."

"But Daddy said he's not coming back," Joanna had hiccupped between sobs.

"He's hardly ever here anyway," Sam had said, wiping her tears with the bottom of his shirt. "We'll be just fine without him, you'll see. And me and Mom will always be here for you."

“You won’t ever go away like Daddy?” four-year-old Joanna had pressed. “Promise?”

He had crossed his heart solemnly. “Promise.”

Joanna remembered it all like it had happened yesterday. So she couldn’t help feeling shocked and betrayed when the very first thing Sam did after he graduated from high school was enlist in the navy. Even though he’d told her again and again it was what he wanted more than anything, she hadn’t believed he would really do it.

He’d never broken a promise to her before. Never.

Joanna scowled at the TV, where Kennedy was sitting behind a desk. The desk and his solemn expression reminded her of Mr. Egan when he gave a test. Ugh! She would have changed the channel except she knew he’d be on all four of them. Instead, she stuck out her tongue at the president and skimmed the weekly TV schedule between spoonfuls of soup. It wasn’t until she heard “Soviet military buildup on the island of Cuba” and “nuclear strike capability” that Joanna looked back at the TV screen and really listened.

“The cost of freedom is always high,” the president said, “but Americans have always paid it. And one path we shall never choose is the path of surrender or submission.”

Surrender? What did he mean? What had she missed?

The phone rang. With Dixie trotting at her heels, Joanna went to the kitchen to answer it, frowning uncertainly back at the TV. “Hello?”

“Hello, Joanna. Let me speak to your mother, please.”

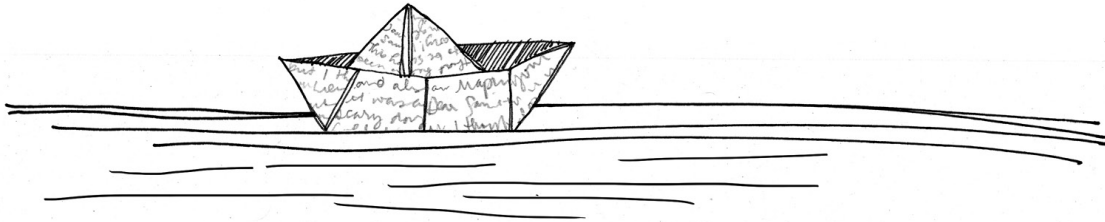
“She’s not here, Grandma.” Joanna stretched the cord of the phone as far as it would go, to see if she could hear the TV with one ear. She couldn’t. At least not well enough to tell what was being said.

“Wouldn’t you know she’d be out gadding about somewhere when she should be home keeping up with what’s going on in the world!”

“She’s at night school, Gram. You know, so she can get her high school diploma and get a better job.” Joanna was surprised to hear herself defending Mom when really she agreed that Mom should be home right now, with her.

Grandma’s long sigh whistled through the phone. “Yes, well, a diploma won’t do her much good if we go to war with the Russians!”

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CHAPTER 3

War?

JOANNA GASPED. “IS THAT WHAT PRESIDENT KENNEDY IS saying—that we’re going to *war*?”

“Depends on what those fool communists do,” Grandma replied in a grim voice. “The missiles they’re setting up in Cuba could blow us all to kingdom come.”

Joanna’s grandmother was not a jokey-smiley, knit-and-bake kind of grandmother. In fact, she could be positively cranky sometimes. Joanna had no problem picturing her scowl on the other end of the phone. There would be a deep Y-shaped groove between her bristly eyebrows, and her lips would be puckered like she was sucking on a Charms sour ball.

Grandma added, “We’re sending ships to Cuba, though, so poor Sam’s probably going to be right in the thick of things. I told Lynn not to let him sign up!”

“Sam’s in danger?” Joanna’s voice quivered.

There was a silence. Then Grandma said in a much perkier voice, “No, honey, of course not. I’m just upset and talking crazy. Sammy will be fine. Don’t you worry.”

Joanna gulped. She could tell Gram was just saying that to make her feel better, and it wasn’t working.

“Tell your mother to call me when she gets home, will you?”

Joanna said she would and hung up. But her heart swelled with so much fear, she thought it might explode. Sam!

She hurried back to the living room, but the president wasn’t on the screen anymore. There were just newscasters talking about the speech and what it might mean for Americans. They wore worried frowns and talked in serious voices. They spoke of possible consequences to the president’s speech. The word *war* was mentioned many times.

Joanna sat on the scratchy rug so she could gather Dixie into her lap. “Don’t worry, Dix,” she whispered. “Sam’ll be all right. And so will we. I promise.” The warmth of Dixie’s body helped ease some of the icy shivers that rippled through Joanna whenever she heard the word *war*.

She knew Russia—technically the Soviet Union—had been an enemy of the United States for a long time. People talked about the Cold War between them. That had confused Joanna. “What’s a cold war? Do they only fight in winter?” she’d asked Sam once.

His chipped tooth had flashed in a grin. “No, it means they don’t fight at all—at least not directly. They know that if they fought one another, it might end in a nuclear war that would destroy both of them.”

“But if they’re not fighting, why do they call it a war?”

Sam had frowned. “It’s kind of hard to explain. But they fight in other ways, usually by supporting opposite sides in wars in smaller countries.”

“That sounds awfully sneaky,” Joanna had said.

“It is. But it’s better than fighting each other outright.” Sam had said this with such certainty that Joanna didn’t doubt that he was right.

Still, she had to say, “I don’t get it. Why can’t everybody just get along? Why do there have to be wars at all?”

“I don’t know, Jo,” he’d said, shaking his head. “It seems stupid, doesn’t it? But I guess it just comes down to people wanting different things and trying to force what they want on everyone else.”

Joanna remembered their conversation now with a shudder. Was Russia suddenly ready to end the Cold War and risk a nuclear one? She was still huddled on the floor with Dixie, trying to make sense out of what the newscasters on TV were saying, when a key turned in the lock and Mom came through the door with a whoosh of cool air.

Dixie ran to greet her and Joanna sprang up from the floor. “You’re home early! I’m so glad. Did you hear the president’s speech?”

Mom dropped her books and purse on the couch and went straight to Joanna to wrap her in a hug. “Yes, Jo, I heard.”

“Do you think there’s going to be a war?” It seemed impossible that Joanna was even asking such a question. War was something that happened in other countries, not here in the United States. Not in Chicago on Maplewood Street.

“Of course not,” Mom said, stroking Joanna’s curls.

“Gram thinks there might be,” Joanna said, her cheek still pressed into Mom’s coat. “She said that Sam will be right in the middle of it.”

Mom stepped back and looked Joanna in the eye. “There won’t be a war,” she said firmly. “And no matter what your grandmother said, Sam will be fine.”

“How do you *know*?” Joanna pressed.

“I just do, that’s all,” Mom said briskly, turning off the television before hanging up her coat. Then, carrying an armful of books, she led the way to the kitchen. She glanced at the pot on the stove. “Leftovers?” she asked, setting her books on the table.

“Huh? Oh. Yes. Cream of tomato soup.” Joanna frowned as her mother lit the burner and gave the pot a stir. In an instant, she seemed to have forgotten all about the president’s speech and Sam.

Mom turned around and raised her eyebrows when she saw Joanna watching her. “Don’t you have homework to do? It’s getting late.”

Joanna sat down and hunched over her books, but from behind her bangs she watched her mother step out of her high heels and wiggle her toes. She nibbled a cracker, then blew tiny crumbs off the front of her dress. She acted so normal, so everything-as-usual, that Joanna felt herself relax. Of *course* there wouldn’t be a war.

Joanna opened her social studies book to read about life in a rain forest. At the start of the chapter she found the small white envelope she’d tucked inside the book last Friday. It said *Joanna* in Sherry’s fancy lettering, in the beautiful peacock-blue ink she’d discovered for her fountain pen.

“Mom,” Joanna said, tugging the invitation out of the envelope. “Have you thought some more about Sherry’s party? Her mother’s making homemade pizzas and there’s going to be games and dancing and everything.” She held out the invitation decorated with colorful cartoon boys and girls jitterbugging. Mom barely glanced at it. She was arranging her books on the table.

“No, I haven’t,” she said, “because I already told you that you can’t go.”

Joanna’s heart dipped. Mom was sticking to her guns. But she could still change her mind. Joanna just had to keep asking and either wear her down or catch her at just the right moment. “But I *have* to go, Mom,” she continued. “Everyone in our class is going. It’s all they’re talking about.”

Mom looked at Joanna. “You’re too young to go to a boy-girl party at night.”

“But Sherry’s father is going to drive us home after—”

“Joanna, please. I’m not going to change my mind, so let’s not waste time arguing when we both have work to do.” She reached over to pat Joanna’s hand but Joanna scowled and jerked her hand away. She stuffed the invitation back in her book and lowered her eyes to the page. The letters wobbled. She had to blink and blink before she could see the words clearly enough to read them.

When she finished her homework, Joanna walked Dixie to the empty lot two doors down. It was a mix of grass and weeds and rocks, and seemed to always have lots of interesting smells. Dixie sniffed for a long time before she found just the right place to do her business. Joanna didn’t mind. She was angry at her mother and in no rush to see her again, although eventually, of course, she had to.

In the meantime, she raised her face to peer up at the night sky. It looked like black velvet studded with sparkly rhinestones or diamonds . . . A thought struck her. Maybe Sam was looking up at these very same stars from his ship! He *could* be. So, in a way, they were still sort of linked. It was like a giant dot-to-dot connection, but it was a *connection*. A knot in her chest loosened.

“G’night, Sam,” she whispered at the brightest star. She walked home with a heart that was a tiny bit lighter than it had been before.

When she opened the front door, she heard her mother’s voice. “What were you thinking of, saying those things to Joanna? You scared her half to death.”

So Mom was talking to Grandma. Joanna forgot the party and wondered again about what her grandmother had said. Was Mom right about there not being anything to worry about? Was Sam really not in any danger?

As she was putting on her pajamas and brushing her teeth, Joanna’s mind jumped from worrying about Sam and the Russians back to worrying about the party. She had to find a way to change Mom’s mind. Maybe if Sherry’s mother called and assured her the party would be carefully chaperoned? No, that would be way too embarrassing. Joanna gritted her teeth. She had to think of something.

When she came out of the bathroom, ready for bed, Mom was cranking a sheet of paper into the battered old typewriter Sam had found at a junk shop and repaired for her. She practiced typing every night for fifteen minutes in hopes that typing skills along with a diploma would help her get a better job than being a sales clerk in the linens department at Goldblatt's.

Mom looked up at Joanna, her fingers poised over the keys. "Will the noise bother you? I'm getting a late start tonight."

Joanna shook her head. "No. It's okay." Sometimes the uneven click-clacks, thumps, and dings of the machine did bother her. But Joanna was pretty sure that between the party and President Kennedy's speech, if she had a hard time getting to sleep, it wouldn't be because of the typewriter.

Her bedroom used to be Sam's room. Before he joined the navy, Joanna had shared her mother's bedroom. She'd slept in a fold-up cot that never got folded up. The cot's mattress had a little dip in the middle from all the years when it *had* been folded up, and the metal wires below had squeaked and squealed every time she rolled over. She'd hated the cot. She'd wanted a real bed and a room of her own more than anything. But if she'd known that getting them would mean losing Sam, she would have gladly slept on that awful cot forever.

The wall above her bed had pictures of horses taped all over it—black-and-white pintos, golden palominos, brown-speckled Appaloosas, and more. Some of the horses stood in beautiful green pastures, others were mid-jump over a fence, others galloped through fields with manes and tails streaming out behind them. All of them were beautiful enough to make Joanna's breath catch sometimes just looking at them. Someday she would have a horse of her own.

Next to her bed was a small table with a lamp. A black-and-white photo of Sam on his graduation day stood leaning against the base of the lamp. He was wearing his funny, flat-topped graduation cap and a long robe that still wasn't long enough to cover his long, *long* legs. The photo wasn't a particularly good one. It had been taken from far away in order to get all of Sam in, so his face was too small to really see. But Joanna remembered how extra wide his grin had been that day.

If the photo had been taken from closer up, she would have been able to see his chipped tooth—the result of a game of stickball when he was ten. Sam said the navy dentists were going to fix it, which pleased Mom but

saddened Joanna. She wanted Sam to come home from the navy exactly the way he was when he left.

She slid into bed, pulled up the covers, and snapped off the lamp. She told herself that everything was going to be okay. Sam was going to be safe. There wasn't going to be a war. And she would find a way to talk Mom into changing her mind about Sherry's party. Then she closed her eyes.

The typewriter keys smacked the ribbon. *Click, click, click-clack. Click . . .*

. . .

Joanna was on her way home when she heard it. A far-off rat-a-tat sound that was followed by a buzzing sound somewhere behind her. Bees! Joanna had been stung once and wasn't eager to be stung again. She broke into a run. But the buzzing got louder.

Suddenly home was just ahead and Sam was standing in the doorway with his arms spread wide. Joanna put on a burst of speed just as a siren pierced the air with a horrible wail. She stopped to look up and saw that the sky was dark, but not with bees—with planes.

Sam called, "Joanna! Come to me! Hurry!"

Bombs fell from the planes. They whistled through the air just like in the movies.

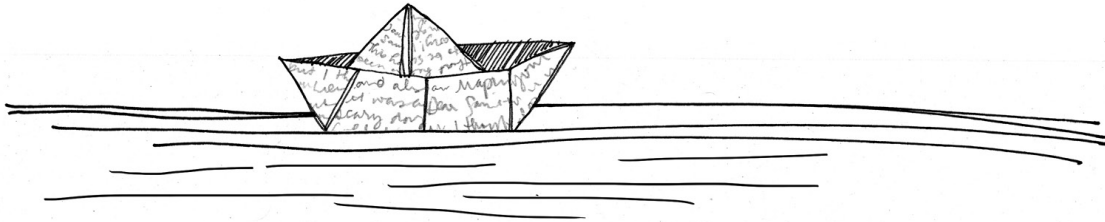
Joanna couldn't move. The whistles got louder as the bombs came closer . . . closer . . .

"Jo!" Strong arms grabbed Joanna and half carried, half dragged her to safety.

"You came back!" Joanna cried. "You came back!"

There was an ear-shattering roar just as Sam slammed the door shut.

Joanna jerked awake. The dim green glow of her alarm clock lit Sam's photo on the bedside table. Dixie yawned and blinked up at her sleepily from the rug beside the bed. Joanna fell back against her pillow, breathing hard. Just a dream. It was just a dream.



CHAPTER 4

Everything Is Different

CLANG! BANG! CLANG! JOANNA COVERED HER HEAD **WITH** her pillow. Stupid radiator! Couldn't it heat up without making such a racket?

The pillow was lifted from her head. Joanna halfway opened one eye.

"Are you all right?" Mom's cool hand settled on Joanna's forehead. "I've been calling and calling."

"I'm okay." Joanna yawned. "Just tired." She hesitated for a moment, then confided, "I had a bad dream."

"Oh, honey." The bed dipped as Mom sat down next to Joanna and hugged her. "Are you all right?" she repeated, but this time more softly.

"Sure," Joanna said lightly. "It was just a dream, right?" But she leaned into the hug and inhaled the comforting scent of Ivory soap mingled with Jergens hand cream—the scent that said "Mom" without any words at all.

Mom squeezed Joanna's shoulder. "It's a brand-new day. Let the dreams go."

If only she could! Last night's dream was still as clear and real as ever. "I just wish Sam . . ." But Joanna didn't bother to finish her wish. There was no point. No amount of wishing was going to bring Sam back. Not for a long time anyway.

Mom's lips parted. For a moment Joanna thought Mom was going to say that she wished Sam hadn't joined the navy, too. But instead she said, "You should write to him, Joanna. You'd feel better. I know you would." She glanced at the transistor radio on Joanna's bedside table and shook her head. "You haven't even thanked him for the radio he sent you." A note of exasperation had crept into Mom's voice.

Joanna sat up and shook her head hard. She thrust out her chin. "I told him I wouldn't write and I meant it."

“But you didn’t *really* mean it, Jo. You know you didn’t. You were just hurt and angry that he was leaving.”

That was true. But it didn’t matter. When Joanna made a promise, she kept it. Not like some people.

Mom added softly, “Your brother loves you very much, Joanna.”

“Then he should have stayed home,” Joanna replied stiffly.

Mom sighed. She looked at Joanna for a long moment before she stood up, making the mattress jiggle. “You’re running late. Better hurry.” Then she left.

Joanna looked at her radio. It was her most precious possession. The morning she had taken it to school, for once *she* had been the one at the center of an admiring huddle of classmates. Even Sherry didn’t have anything as cool as a radio so tiny it could fit in the palm of her hand. And even though Joanna knew it was meant as a bribe to make her forgive Sam, she couldn’t shove it in her drawer with his letters and ignore it the way the angry part of her wanted to. It was too perfect. Too special. It was irresistible.

It was her favorite color, turquoise. It had earphones, so if she wanted to, she could listen and no one else could. And she could take it anywhere just by slipping it into a pocket. Every time she turned it on, she felt a twinge of shame. But she turned it on anyway.

She hadn’t written to Sam since he’d left. Not even to add a PS to one of her mother’s letters. Still, he wrote to her at least once a week. Not writing to him was her only way to show him how much he’d hurt her. She knew it was childish. She knew she wouldn’t be able to keep it up forever. But the hurt inside her still burned nearly as hot as it had the day Sam had left. She couldn’t forgive him. Not yet.

Joanna picked up the radio, but before she turned it on, she paused. What if instead of music there was more scary talk about Russia and war? What if—what if a war had already started? Her stomach knotted. But she had to know. She took a deep breath, held it, and turned the dial.

“That was the Four Seasons, kids,” the DJ announced over the last notes of “Sherry.” “It’s number three for the second week in a row. And the top two songs are coming up right after a quick weather report. Don’t go ’way!”

Joanna exhaled loudly. If anything awful was going on in the world—like war breaking out—it would be all over the radio. Mom was right.

Everything was going to be fine.

She tossed the covers over her bed and snatched a skirt and blouse from her closet as she listened to the forecast for another chilly October day. She was tugging a sweater over her blouse when the DJ returned to announce, “Here’s the number two song, and a great tune for the week before Halloween”—cymbals crashed—”‘Monster Mash,’ by Bobby ‘Boris’ Pickett and the Crypt-Kickers.”

Joanna couldn’t resist. She sang along with the funny song and danced while the radiator under her window banged in the background like a bad drummer.

“Corn Flakes or Rice Krispies?” Mom called from the kitchen.

“Corn Flakes,” Joanna called back, scrabbling through her drawer for socks, but carefully avoiding the packet of letters that was hidden there.

She was tugging up her bobby socks when the DJ cut in again. “It’s eight fifteen . . .” Eight fifteen! Joanna stuffed her feet into her penny loafers, grabbed her radio and hairbrush, and ran to the bathroom.

“There’s a banana for your cereal,” Mom said, whisking past the doorway, a blur of green robe.

Yuck! That had to be the same banana that was speckled with black spots yesterday. The spots would only be bigger and blacker today. “I can’t eat that,” Joanna called after her mother. “It’s rotten. You should throw it away.”

“It is not rotten,” her mother denied. “And we don’t throw away perfectly good food in this house.”

Joanna sighed. There was nothing perfect about that banana, but she had a more important battle to win. “Mom, pretty please,” she begged. “Say I can go to Sherry’s party—*pleeeeeeease*.”

Joanna heard her mother’s sigh from two rooms away. “Must we have this discussion every day? I’ve already given you my answer.”

Joanna scowled into the mirror. It wasn’t fair. Lots of times Mom could be coaxed into changing her mind. But now she was being as stubborn as the rust stains in the sink, which wouldn’t budge no matter how hard anyone scrubbed at them.

If only Sam were here. Sam could talk Mom into anything. But Sam was on a ship far, far from home. Maybe heading for Cuba.

“Everything is different now.” Joanna didn’t realize she’d said the words out loud until her mother appeared in the doorway buttoning the front of her dress.

“Things are always changing, Joanna,” she said in a soft voice. “It’s part of life.” She smiled before taking a step backward to look Joanna up and down. “That skirt fits perfectly. I’ll have to thank Sharon again for thinking of you.” Sharon worked with Mom and sometimes gave her clothes that her daughter had outgrown.

Suddenly Mom frowned. “Are you wearing mascara, young lady?”

“Just a *teensy* bit,” Joanna said. “All the girls wear it. It’s not against the rules or anything.”

“It’s against *my* rules. Now wash it off, please.”

“But you almost didn’t even notice!” Joanna protested.

Mom closed her eyes and took a deep breath. “I don’t have time for this, Joanna. You know I don’t want you wearing makeup while you’re still in grade school.”

“Fine,” Joanna huffed, snatching up a washcloth to wipe her lashes. “You’re so strict—why don’t you just send me to Catholic school and be done with it?”

“Maybe because we’re not Catholic?” Mom suggested wearily.

Joanna scowled. Then she had a brainstorm. “I won’t wear makeup to school ever again,” she bargained, “if you let me go to the party. Cross my heart and hope to *die*.”

“No makeup *and* no party,” Mom said firmly.

“But why?” Joanna wailed. “All the other girls wear makeup.”

“I’m not their mother.”

“Lucky them,” Joanna muttered. The flash of hurt that crossed Mom’s face made Joanna’s cheeks burn, but she didn’t take the words back. Instead, she used the whimper from the next room as an excuse to march out of the room.

Dixie was pacing back and forth at the front door. “Do you want to go for a walk?” Joanna asked. Dixie wagged her tail and yipped. Joanna’s anger melted. She laughed, grabbed her jacket from its hook, and snapped on Dixie’s leash. Together they trotted down the street.

When they came back, Joanna splashed milk over the bowl of dry cereal Mom had left out for her. When Sam was home, he would sit across from

her eating his Wheaties from Mom's medium-sized mixing bowl. He'd be reading a book or a magazine or a newspaper. Sam was always reading something.

Joanna mechanically ate her cereal but her thoughts were troubled. There still hadn't been any news on her regular radio station. Which was good. But maybe she was missing something important. Joanna hesitated. Then she spun the dial recklessly until she heard a serious voice.

"... speech last night has the whole world wondering what the Soviets will do next. There has been no reported response from the Kremlin, but navy battleships are already steaming toward Cuba and observers say the atmosphere surrounding the White House today is extremely sober."

Joanna's mouth was suddenly dry. She took a quick gulp of milk.

The newsman continued, "Some senators and congressmen have expressed concern that the president's tone may provoke the Soviet Union to even more aggressive behavior. Others support his firm stand on behalf of United States security.

"That's the latest on the situation for now. We'll be updating our reports throughout the day, though, so stay tuned. And in case of emergency, remember to turn your radio to the Civil Defense station, marked by a triangle within a circle on your dial, for instructions."

Joanna was sorry now that she'd listened. The way that newscaster talked about emergency information sent goose bumps skittering up the back of her neck. Quickly, she spun the dial back to its normal setting, where Nat King Cole was singing "Ramblin' Rose." His velvety voice wrapped itself around her like a hug. Yes. That was much better.

Joanna was eating the last spoonful of her cereal when Mom swept in to get her lunch bag from the refrigerator. She blew a kiss at Joanna. "Don't forget. I have class tonight, so I'll be home late."

"Right," Joanna said.

The front door closed, and Joanna sighed. How come she was grown-up enough to be alone at night, but she was too young to go to a party with a bunch of other kids and parents? Sam got to join the navy. Mom got to go to night school. Everybody got to do what they wanted except Joanna. It wasn't fair!

Joanna's chin went up. She stalked into the bathroom. Two minutes later her eyelashes were darker, longer, and fuller thanks to the magic of

mascara. She gave herself a satisfied nod in the mirror. So there!

She grabbed her books and ran out of the house to meet Pamela, who for once was there before her. But the moment Joanna saw the pinched look on Pamela's face, her insides went cold. "Did your parents listen to President Kennedy's speech last night?" Joanna asked.

She hoped desperately that Pamela would say, "What speech?" She hoped the look on Pamela's face had to do with Marie or even a stomachache—anything except the president's speech.

But Pamela bobbed her head bleakly. "We all did. He came on just as Mom was calling us to supper. She was so upset by what he was saying, she forgot to go back and turn off the oven. Supper was ruined. Not that anybody had much of an appetite."

Joanna drew in a sharp breath. "Your parents think there'll be a war?"

"Mom's afraid there will be. Daddy says even Khrushchev isn't that crazy—but he *looked* worried." Pamela glanced back at their building. "Mom wanted to keep Marie and me home today, but Daddy wouldn't let her. He told her to get hold of herself and stop frightening us kids."

Joanna hugged her notebook to her stomach, which had become one big block of ice. "My mom said everything is going to be fine," she said, hoping that Pamela couldn't hear her teeth chattering.

"My father said the same thing, and he's almost always right," Pamela said. "But it's scary, y'know?" Her green eyes were troubled. Joanna had a feeling Pamela was wishing she was safe at home with her mother instead of going farther and farther away with every step.

Joanna forced a smile and careless shrug. "By tonight I bet everything'll be back to normal."

Pamela's head jerked quickly up and down, up and down. "Yeah. You're probably right."

The playground wasn't nearly as crowded or noisy as usual. Only the youngest kids were playing. The rest were standing around in stiff little bunches. Boys and girls together.

"My father says there's nothing to worry about," Joanna heard Sherry announce as she and Pamela walked up. "Russia will back down because all commies are cowards."

Two or three of Sherry's listeners nodded as if their parents had said the same thing. But Theo shook his head. "My dad says the Soviets are crazy

fanatics who want to take over the world. There's no telling what they'll do now that they've been challenged." His eyes were cloudy gray-blue, like Lake Michigan before a storm.

Joanna's heart quivered. Theo was afraid, too.

The first bell rang. Joanna fought down a sudden urge to run home and snuggle under her covers with Dixie. Instead, she swallowed hard and plodded inside with everyone else.

That morning there wasn't any horsing around in the cloakroom. Jackets were hung and kids went to their desks with hardly any detours along the way. When Mr. Egan entered the room, for the first time ever he didn't have to call for quiet. It was already so hushed, Joanna heard the click of the minute hand when it moved to the straight-up position. Nine o'clock. The final bell rang.

Mr. Egan set his briefcase on his desk. "Good morning, class." Joanna stared at him along with her classmates. Mr. Egan might have white-speckled shoulders and wear thick glasses and ugly ties, but he was their teacher. He was supposed to have all the answers. Did *he* think there would be a war?

"I understand what a confusing time this must be for you," he said. "And I promise you we'll talk about it. But first, let's say the Pledge of Allegiance."

Joanna stood with everyone else and rested her right hand over her heart. She looked at the flag hanging from the wall at the front of the room. She hardly ever noticed it except when she was saying the pledge. Now she thought of the wars that had been fought to keep it flying. Was there about to be another one? And if there was, who would win?

After the pledge, Mr. Egan took attendance. Twelve students were absent. Over one-third of the class. Finally, Mr. Egan closed his black attendance book and said, "Let's begin at the beginning."

He pointed out Cuba on the pull-down map at the front of the room and showed them how close the island was to Florida. Only ninety miles away! Then he explained how Cuba's leader, Fidel Castro, a communist friendly with the Russians, had been getting weapons from them—weapons that were supposed to be for self-defense only.

"But President Kennedy has evidence that they've been setting up missile bases," Mr. Egan said. "Bases that will be capable of launching

nuclear missiles at the United States. President Kennedy has insisted they be removed. And he's sending American ships to quarantine Cuba—to prevent Russian ships from bringing in any more missiles.”

Mr. Egan walked to the front of his desk. He tugged on his tie, which was an uglier than usual brown and gold plaid. “I don’t believe this situation will end in war,” he said, “but right now nothing is certain. All we can do is hope and pray all will be well.”

Sherry raised her hand and proudly announced that her father had been in World War II and the Korean War. “He says there’s nothing to worry about. American GIs can whip any army, Russians included.”

Murmurs of agreement rippled through the class.

Joanna’s hand shot up. “My brother, Sam, is in the navy, on a destroyer in the Atlantic. He could be part of the quarantine.”

Kids turned and looked at Joanna with expressions of surprise, concern, and respect. Joanna blushed and lowered her eyes. She hadn’t wanted attention for herself. She just wanted people to know that Sam might be in danger. As if the more people who knew, the safer he would be. Which was stupid. It wouldn’t make a difference. She slid down in her seat and blushed hotter, glad when everyone turned back toward Mr. Egan.

“I’m sure your family is very concerned about Sam’s safety,” Mr. Egan said. “But I’m also sure you’re very proud of him.”

Joanna chewed on her lower lip. Was she proud of Sam? She had so many Sam-feelings swirling around inside, they were hard to separate from one another. She was angry at him, she knew that for sure. And she loved him. Mad as she was, she still knew that for sure, too. But proud? She was too full of fear for him to tell. She just wished he was home and safe.

A boy with a blue office pass scurried into the classroom with a note. Mr. Egan read it and the boy hurried off. Mr. Egan cleared his throat. “That was a message from Principal Owens. There will be an air-raid drill at nine forty-five. It’s just a drill—a practice. There’s no reason to be alarmed.”

Desks creaked as kids twisted around to look at one another. Joanna saw the fear that she was feeling reflected on each of their faces. She wished she had stayed home.

When the bell rang to begin the drill, Joanna was the second one to the front of the room. She followed Debbie Rickers into the hallway. They sat

on the cold floor, facing the wall and hunched forward, covering their heads with their hands—duck and cover, it was called.

Joanna didn't realize Theo was on her other side until he jostled her with his elbow. "Sorry," he whispered.

He was so close she could hear each of his breaths—in and out, in and out. But then she heard something that made her forget about even the nearness of Theo.

Somewhere down the hall a kid was crying. That in itself was pretty bad. But even worse was the fact that no one—not even Billy Hammersley—laughed or even snickered.

In that moment, the truth struck Joanna like a lightning bolt that lit up everything and jolted her from head to toe—the "whole truth," like they said on *Perry Mason*, "and nothing but the truth." Mr. Egan had said they should pray. That alone should have told her how bad things were—a teacher in public school talking about praying! But now she understood why.

If the Russians attacked the United States, it would almost certainly be with nuclear weapons. Nuclear bombs wouldn't just destroy a few buildings, the way regular bombs did in war movies. They'd destroy whole cities.

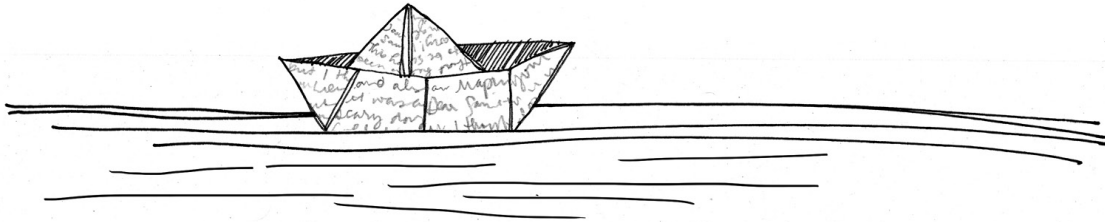
She and Sam had watched an episode of *The Twentieth Century* about how during World War II, the United States gathered a bunch of scientists together to create the first atom bomb so they could end the war. The program even showed the bomb being dropped on a Japanese city. When it exploded, it sent up a giant mushroom-shaped cloud of radiation that spread for miles and miles. It killed thousands and thousands of people and made many of the rest of them sick for a long time afterward.

If the Russians dropped nuclear bombs on cities in the United States, some lucky people who had bomb shelters might be okay. But what about the rest of them?

Joanna shivered. Her stomach cramped. She looked around and didn't know whether to laugh or cry, because if the Russians attacked Chicago, all the ducking and covering in the world wouldn't help.

Not one tiny bit.

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CHAPTER 5

The Watermans

JOANNA TROTTED UP THE CONCRETE STAIRS TO THE MAIN entrance of her building. But when she reached the top, her movements suddenly became stealthy. As quietly as any burglar, she eased the outer door open and closed.

The stairway to the second- and third-floor apartments was on her left. The door to Mrs. Strengé's apartment was on her right. Joanna tiptoed to the left, but all the while she *looked* to the right. She held her breath and listened for any sound that might signal the apartment door was about to open. If it did, Joanna was prepared to run.

But Mrs. Strengé's apartment was silent. So silent that for one little part of a second Joanna was tempted to flip over the newspaper on the old woman's doormat to see if the headline said anything about Cuba. She quickly thought better of it and fled up the stairs, past the Nowickis' apartment on the second floor and up to the third.

Joanna expected Pamela to answer her knock, so she was surprised when Mrs. Waterman opened the door.

Joanna thought Mrs. Waterman was beautiful even when she was wearing one of Mr. Waterman's old shirts over her clothes, and her hair was in a long out-of-the-way braid—which was how she looked when she painted. But she was extra beautiful today. Her red-gold hair was swept up into a fashionable French twist, and she was wearing a pretty green dress.

Mrs. Waterman was an honest-to-goodness artist. Her studio was the sunroom that opened off the living room, and her framed paintings hung on nearly every wall of the apartment. Lately, though, she seemed to be taking a vacation from painting. Her easel had been holding the same half-finished painting of a woman for weeks now. And instead of the apartment smelling faintly of turpentine and paint, as it always used to, today it smelled deliciously of bread baking. Joanna's stomach growled loudly. She'd been

so eager to see Pamela's surprise, she hadn't taken the time to eat a snack. She'd just walked Dixie quickly and dashed upstairs.

Mrs. Waterman smiled. "I sent Pamela to the corner to mail a birthday card for me," she said. "Come have a slice of bread while you wait for her, and I'll tell you some exciting news." She led the way down the hallway to the kitchen, her high heels tapping against the linoleum.

In the kitchen, Mrs. Waterman cut into a golden loaf of bread, but her eyes never left Joanna. They were green, like Pamela's, and just then they were glowing. "Pamela's uncle Zachary has been transferred from his job in St. Louis," she announced.

"That's nice," Joanna said, though she didn't see what was so exciting about that.

Mrs. Waterman shook her head as if she heard what Joanna was thinking. "I haven't told you where he's been transferred *to*, Joanna. To *Paris*! Can you imagine? Paris, *France*!"

Joanna's mouth fell open. Paris was where Mrs. Waterman would have gone to study painting if she hadn't married Mr. Waterman. She had books about Paris in her studio and it looked like an amazing place. "Golly!" Joanna breathed.

Mrs. Waterman laughed and handed her a slice of warm bread. "Golly, indeed! He flies to Paris on Friday, but he's coming to Chicago today to spend a few days with us first."

The front door slammed. Pamela hurried in. She must have run both ways. Her cheeks were pink and she was panting like Dixie did after a good workout. She grabbed Joanna's arm. "C'mon."

Mrs. Waterman protested, "Don't you want some fresh bread and milk first?"

Pamela shook her head. "Maybe later." She turned to start down the hall.

"Did you get your math test back?"

Pamela turned back with a loud sigh. "No. And I did my homework at school. Now can I please *go*?"

Joanna squirmed. If she spoke to her mother that way, she'd be sent to her room—and she'd be expected to apologize when she came out. But Mrs. Waterman wasn't as strict as Joanna's mom. She raised both hands in defeat. "Go."

Pamela dragged Joanna down the hall to the room she shared with Marie and closed the door. She put a finger to her lips, but behind her finger she was grinning wickedly. She opened the closet door and reached into the pocket of Marie's fluffy white robe. "Look at this!" she said, pulling out a paperback book. Not Marie's diary. Something even better.

Joanna sucked in a breath at the sight of the familiar cover. "Oh my gosh!"

She and Pamela had heard eighth-grade girls whispering about this book at recess and knew it was about love and romance and even s-e-x. They'd been desperate to read it, but they'd been too scared to buy it at the drugstore, where old Mrs. Schuman might report back to their mothers. Now, though, thanks to Marie, they had it anyway. Joanna let out an excited squeal and dived onto the floor next to Pamela in the valley between her bed and Marie's.

They read the first few pages and stopped to frown at each another.

"I don't see why everybody's so excited about it," Pamela complained. "It's boring so far."

Joanna nodded her agreement, licking the last crumbs of bread from her fingers. She flipped forward a few pages and read a few lines. Nothing exciting there, either. Then she noticed something.

"Hey, look," she said. "Some of the pages have bent corners. Let's see what's on them!"

Quickly they turned to the first page with a folded corner. A minute later they looked at each other wide-eyed and whispered, "Oh my gosh! Do you believe this?"

They were still huddled there, several folded pages later, when they heard the front door close. "Marie!" Pamela gasped. She slapped the book shut and leaped over her bed to stuff it back into its hiding place. Joanna sprang up from the floor and plopped on top of the bed. Pamela closed the closet door and dropped down beside her just seconds before Marie entered the room.

"Oh, hi, Marie," Pamela said. Her voice tried hard to sound casual and innocent. "I didn't know you were home." She smiled brightly. *Too* brightly.

Joanna winced. Pamela sure didn't have any of Marie's acting ability. Marie had narrowed her eyes and was scanning the room. She probably

thought they'd been messing with her makeup again. Joanna fought an urge to look at the closet. Had Pamela closed the door all the way?

Then Joanna had a brainstorm. "How's the new play going?" she asked.

Marie underwent an immediate transformation. She tipped her head graciously at Joanna. She was no longer Marie the Big Sister, she was Marie the Actress. "Pretty well," she said. "Romeo needs help memorizing his lines, so we're going to have some extra practices together." By the satisfied look on Marie's face, Joanna guessed that spending time with Romeo wouldn't be exactly painful.

Pamela made a show of looking at the clock on the bedside table. "Uh-oh. I promised Mom I'd set the table," she said. She got up and slipped past Marie.

"See ya, Marie," Joanna said, scooting after Pamela. She closed the door behind her before she whispered, "Whew—that was close!"

Pamela hugged herself and twirled around. "Isn't that book *something*?"

Mr. Waterman came out of the kitchen before Joanna could answer. He nearly always drove Marie home after her rehearsals because he was a history teacher at her high school. "Hi, sweetie." He kissed Pamela's cheek. "Hello, Joanna. What've you two been up to?"

Joanna looked at Pamela. They both burst into guilty giggles. Mr. Waterman shook his head. "I should know better than to ask, I suppose." He settled into his big stuffed chair. "School okay today?" he asked Pamela.

She perched on the arm of the chair. "A little strange, but okay." She smoothed a pleat on her skirt. "We had an air-raid drill . . ." Her voice trailed off. Mr. Waterman opened his mouth like he was going to say something, but Pamela quickly added, "When's Uncle Zach going to get here?"

Mr. Waterman glanced at his wristwatch. "Any time now, I should think." He half closed one eye and frowned in thought. "It's been four, no, five years since I last saw him. At Grandpa Huey's funeral. He's been too busy building his career to take time off even to visit his family."

Joanna was curious. "What does he do exactly?"

"He's a newspaper reporter. And I guess all his hard work has paid off, because he just got a job as a foreign correspondent. He'll be covering stories all over Europe."

“Wow!” said Joanna. “That sounds exciting.” Maybe she’d be a reporter someday.

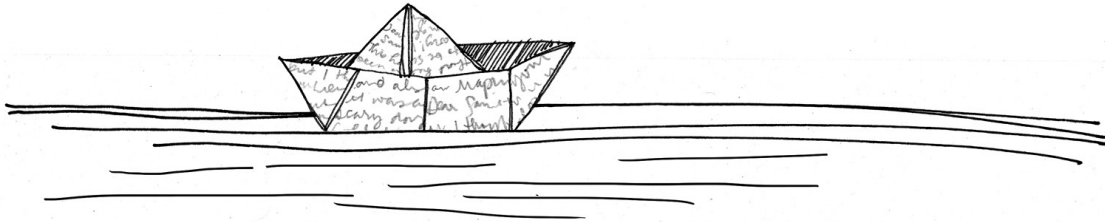
Mr. Waterman shook open his paper. Joanna edged toward the door and Pamela followed. “I should probably go home now,” Joanna said.

Pamela sighed, but nodded. Then she whispered, “We’ll read more tomorrow.”

Joanna grinned and started down the stairs. Her head was full of the astonishing things she’d read. The creak of a door opening below only half registered. Luckily, just as she was about to step into the first-floor entryway, she heard a moan that stopped her in her tracks. A misshapen hand grabbed the newspaper from the mat. Then it disappeared inside the first-floor apartment and the door banged shut. A nasty odor filled the hallway. Yuck! It smelled like peppermint mixed with stinky cheese and cabbage—only worse.

Joanna held her breath and flew through the outside door as if she were jet-propelled. A yellow taxi drove up as she dashed down the stairs. Safe on the sidewalk, she paused to watch a man get out—a tall man with blond hair spilling onto his forehead. It had to be Uncle Zach, although he sure didn’t look like any of Joanna’s uncles, who were either plump or bald or both. He looked more like Troy Donahue, the movie star.

Joanna suddenly realized she was staring, so she hurried the rest of the way to the basement. But she couldn’t help thinking again that Pamela had the best luck of anyone she knew, even when it came to uncles.



The Horrible Things Joanna Said

DIXIE'S EXCITED WELCOME MADE JOANNA FEEL GUILTY about leaving her alone so quickly after school, so she tried to make it up to her.

"Play ball!" she cried like an umpire at a ball game, and Dixie raced for her rubber ball. Over and over Joanna tossed the ball and Dixie chased it, running from one end of the apartment to the other. But eventually the little dog had enough. She let the ball roll into a corner and padded over to her water dish to drink thirstily.

Joanna eyed the starburst clock on the living room wall. Four thirty. Too early for supper. And Joanna had only a little bit of homework to do. She could turn on the television. *The Three Stooges* would be on. Maybe that would erase the nagging memory of how close she'd come to running into Mrs. Strenge—and wondering what would have happened to her if she had.

Would that knobby white hand have grabbed her and dragged her into the first-floor apartment, never to be heard from again? She gulped. *Don't talk to strangers*, Sam and Mom always said. And she never did. But what was she supposed to do when the strangest stranger of them all lived in her very own building?

Joanna didn't turn on the TV. Instead, she plopped onto the stuffed armchair next to the table that held Sam's framed navy picture. Most of the time she tried not to look at that photo—partly because the stern-faced young man in the stiff-looking uniform didn't look like *her* Sam, but mostly because looking at it always brought back the one memory of Sam that Joanna wished she could forget. Lately, though, that memory shoved its way into her mind more and more often, even without the help of the photograph.

Sam had left for basic training a few weeks after graduation. He'd been gone for eight weeks, but he called every Sunday afternoon and wrote

letters twice a week. And since he was only forty-five miles away at the Great Lakes naval base, Joanna's aunt and uncle even drove her and Mom up to visit him one Sunday afternoon. Still, Joanna had missed Sam like crazy. She didn't know how she would stand it when he went away for a whole year.

Sam got two weeks of leave when his training was finished. Mom took her week of vacation during one of them. She cooked all of Sam's favorite meals, and lots of relatives came to visit—Grandma and Grandpa, Uncle Joe and Aunt Violet, Aunt Sue and Uncle Phil and their boys, and Great-Aunt Jenny, who was hard of hearing and kept saying "What? Speak up!"

On the days that Mom had to work, Joanna and Sam did all their favorite things. They went fishing at the lagoon in Humboldt Park. They went swimming at Oak Street Beach. They even spent an entire afternoon and most of an evening at Riverview Amusement Park and set a new record for how many times they rode the Bobs roller coaster in a single visit—six!

But no matter how much fun they had, it seemed like there was always a clock tick-tick-ticking inside Joanna's head, reminding her that very soon Sam would be going far away. It made even the happiest times a little sad.

Eventually the long-dreaded day arrived, and Joanna discovered what she'd suspected all along—that the pain she'd felt at imagining Sam's departure was nothing compared to how much it hurt now that it was really happening. She knew she had to say her good-bye quickly or risk not being able to say it at all.

"I'll miss you, Sam," she choked around the lump that filled her throat, hugging him hard one last time at the front door.

"I'll miss you, too, Jo. Be sure to write me lots of letters, okay?"

She nodded. "I will."

Mom came up behind them just as Joanna was turning to go back inside. She was relieved to have gotten through the horrible farewell without bursting into tears. But tears weren't far away, and she was in a hurry to get to the bathroom, where she could let them flow unseen.

"Joanna, where are you going?" Mom asked. "You're not going stay in here when you could be with Sam?" It sounded like a question, but from the look on Mom's face it wasn't really. "We'll keep him company while he waits for his taxi," she added.

Sam was already striding up the stairs to the sidewalk. Each step he took cut off more of his body. First his head, then his shoulders, his back, his legs, and finally his feet. Then he was gone.

Joanna gulped. She said the first excuse she thought of. "I forgot to feed Dixie."

"Dixie will be fine waiting another five minutes." Mom put her arm around Joanna's waist. "You'll wish you'd spent every possible minute with Sam after he's gone." She herded Joanna up to the sidewalk.

But Mom had been wrong. Because if Joanna had stayed inside that day, she wouldn't get a sick feeling in her stomach every time she thought of Sam now. She should've faked having to throw up or something. Anything to have stayed in the apartment.

They found Sam standing at the curb, looking up the street for his taxi. He was dressed in his white uniform again after two weeks of being in regular clothes. His tall blue drawstring bag was beside him. He was whistling softly and tapping his foot.

Joanna frowned. He acted as if he couldn't wait to leave.

He turned toward them and his whistling stopped. Tears stung her eyes, so Joanna focused on the goofy-looking sailor hat on Sam's close-shaved head. Mom was telling him to be sure to take pictures with his graduation camera and send some in his letters, when suddenly she gave a little squeal.

"Camera!" she said. "I have to get mine!" She dashed back into the apartment for her old Brownie while Joanna stared after her in amazement. Why would she want a reminder of such a horrible day?

One tear escaped the corner of her eye. She quickly wiped it away, but eagle-eyed Sam spotted it, and he made the mistake of trying to comfort her. "It's not like I'm never coming back," he said, but his grin made the words seem almost flippant.

"A year!" Joanna huffed. "That's a long time."

Sam cupped her chin in his hand and looked right into her eyes. "I know it seems that way now, Jo, but it will go quickly, you'll see. And just imagine—I'll be traveling all over the world! I'll see places I could only dream about before. And I'll send you something special from every one of them."

She pulled away from his hand and shot him a reproachful look. "You can't bribe me like some little kid."

He bit his lip. "I didn't mean it that way. I know you're not a kid. But that's just the point. You're old enough to understand why I'm doing this." He sighed. Was he sad? Or was he frustrated, even irritated, with her? Was he wishing his taxi would hurry up and arrive so he could go and begin his new, exciting life without her?

"All I understand is that I'm going to miss you," she said stiffly.

"Come on, Joanna," he coaxed. "It's not the end of the world. You'll still have Mom and Dixie and Pamela. We'll write long letters to each other. And when I come home on leave, we'll do all kinds of fun things together —"

He meant his words to soothe her, she knew. But each one felt like another blow to her already breaking heart. He made his leaving sound like such a small thing. Like she should be able to get over missing him in an afternoon. Maybe because that's the way it was going to be for him. He was going to go off on his adventures and not even think about how much Joanna was missing him. He'd probably hardly think about her at all!

Her simmering anger suddenly boiled over. "I don't care about doing things when you come home," she exploded. "I don't want you to go. I asked you over and over again not to sign up. But you didn't listen. You didn't care what I wanted." Her voice hardened. "You promised you'd never leave me, but you are. You're leaving just like Dad did."

The part about their dad seemed to have come from nowhere. But once she said it, she knew it was a truth she'd been hiding from for months.

Sam's eyes widened. He started to protest, "Joanna—!" But then his mouth just hung open, silent, as if he didn't know what to say, or how to defend himself. As if he acknowledged the truth of what she'd said. And that just made Joanna feel more justified in her anger.

She put her hands on her hips. She jutted out her chin. "All you care about is yourself," she cried. "Not me. Not Mom." She shook her head. A tear flew onto Sam's hand and glistened there. She forced her eyes to look away from it, back into her brother's shocked face. "Maybe Mom can forgive you, but I can't. So don't expect any letters from me. I'm not going to write a single one." She glared up at him. "That's a promise—and unlike *some* people, I *keep* my promises."

Her last view of Sam was a white-and-blue blur, because by the time she finished, she was bawling like a baby. She stumbled blindly back into the

house, just missing crashing into Mom coming out with her camera.

That terrible day in September, Joanna had been glad to know she'd hurt Sam. But now thinking of it made her squirm with shame.

She sighed, and as if she were waking from a dream, she looked around. While she'd been lost in her memories, the room had gotten dark. The good thing about that was she couldn't see Sam's eyes staring back at her from the photo, looking hurt and disappointed. At least that's how they always looked to her.

She stood to turn on the lamp. But before she could reach it, the front doorknob rattled.

Joanna froze. Mom was at night school.

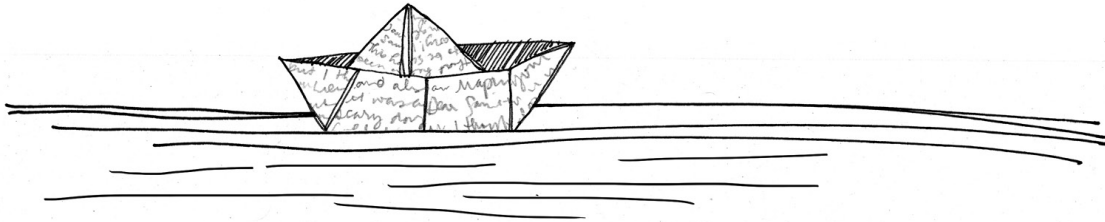
Her heart pounded so hard, it was all she could hear. She tried to yell "Who's there?" but her throat had twisted shut. No sound came out.

She wanted to run and hide in her closet. But to do that, she'd have to pass the door. And it was opening.

Who was going to come in?

Mrs. Strenger?

Or a burglar who thought no one was home because the apartment was dark?



CHAPTER 7

Letters

DIXIE RACED INTO THE ROOM BARKING FRANTICALLY AS a shadowy figure entered the apartment. Joanna gripped the back of the chair tightly. Maybe Dixie would scare whoever it was away!

The door closed quickly. Joanna couldn't move. She could barely breathe. Had the burglar run away? Or was he inside the house with the door locked behind him? Dixie's barking stopped abruptly. She gave a little yelp. *Had the burglar hurt her?*

Then light flooded the room, and there was Mom, with Dixie wagging hello at her feet. "How come you're standing in the dark?" Mom asked.

Joanna's heart stuttered back to life. "Oh my gosh!" Her knees gave out and she sagged against the chair. "You *scared* me!"

"My goodness, you're white as a sheet! I'm sorry. I guess I should have called to tell you my class was cancelled." Mom shrugged off her coat. "But who else would it be but me?"

Joanna's voice shook. "A burglar. A kidnapper. Anyone." She followed Mom to the kitchen on wobbly legs.

"You and your imagination," Mom teased.

"You were supposed to be late tonight," Joanna defended herself. "Besides, it's not just my imagination. The lady on the first floor is really creepy. You should see the way she stares at me from her window. And awful smells come out of her apartment. I'll bet she brews pots of poison."

Mom gave her a quick hug. "Joanna, I know it's hard being home alone so much. And I'm sorry. But letting your imagination run away with you will only make matters worse. You have nothing to fear from Mrs. Streng. She's just an ordinary old woman, not some kind of monster."

"But remember that girl I told you about?" Joanna pressed. "The one who ran out of Mrs. Streng's apartment crying?"

“She could have been frightened by any number of things,” Mom said on her way to the refrigerator. “The wild white hair, the wrinkles. Who knows?”

An idea struck Joanna with such force that she gasped. “What if Mrs. Strengé isn’t old at all,” she suggested. “What if that’s just a disguise she wears so people *think* she’s old and harmless. But really she’s—”

“Joanna—” Mom began.

“No, really, Mom. She’s got that funny accent. Maybe she’s a Russian spy and she—”

“Joanna Maxwell, that’s enough! You’re going to give yourself more nightmares.”

Joanna stopped, but she wasn’t convinced.

“Now,” Mom said, opening the refrigerator, “what shall we have for supper?”

Joanna, sulking, didn’t reply.

“How about some bacon and eggs?” Mom suggested.

Joanna grunted.

Mom must have taken that for a yes. She pulled out the carton of eggs. Before she cracked even one, though, the phone rang. It was Aunt Violet. They could talk for hours. Joanna slipped away to watch *Love That Bob*, a comedy that would hopefully restore her sense of humor.

Half an hour later, Mom hung up the phone and called Joanna to set the table. When they finished eating, Joanna cleared the dirty dishes while Mom ran soapy water into the sink. Joanna checked the clock on the wall. Nearly six. “I’ll dry the dishes after I watch the news.”

“You? The news?” Mom repeated in astonishment.

“I want to know what’s happening with Cuba,” Joanna explained.

“You don’t need to worry about that,” Mom said. “Get a head start on your homework instead.”

“Mo-om, this is important,” Joanna said. Then she had her second brainstorm of the day. She crossed her fingers behind her back. “We’re supposed to watch for social studies. There’ll probably be a quiz tomorrow.”

Mom sighed. “Okay. Watch. Just remember, everything is going to be fine.”

Joanna nodded. "Yeah. Sure. I know." But she wasn't as sure today as she had been yesterday. And the news didn't help.

The "quarantine" of Cuba would go into effect the next morning, Walter Cronkite announced. No ships carrying missiles or launching equipment would be allowed past the American ships guarding the shoreline. If they tried to slip through, they would be fired on and sunk.

Fired on! What if Sam's ship was part of the quarantine? What if one of the Russian ships fired back? What if Sam's ship was blown up or sunk? Joanna clasped her arms around her knees to try to keep them from trembling worse than they had when she'd thought there was a burglar breaking in.

"Time to turn off the television and do homework," Mom called.

Joanna forced herself to stand and walk. She turned off the TV with a hand that was freezing cold and sweating at the same time.

When Mom didn't ask her about the news, Joanna volunteered, "Ships are surrounding Cuba so no more missiles can get through."

"Mmmhmmm," Mom said as she sat down across from Joanna and opened a thick book.

"If the ships don't stop to be inspected, we're going to blow them up," Joanna added, watching her mother closely.

Mom looked up, but only to ask, "How was school today?"

Joanna felt a surge of anger, but she kept her voice even. "We had an air-raid drill. Somebody started crying. You know. The usual."

Mom blinked. She fiddled with one of the blue buttons on her dress. "We were busy today," she said at last. "Everyone seemed to need towels."

Towels? Joanna wanted to talk about the scary things going on in the world, and all Mom cared about were *towels*? She gave up and opened her notebook, but she had a hard time concentrating. Mom, though, sitting right across from her, seemed to have no trouble at all. While Joanna's eyes kept stalling over the words and she read the same sentences over and over, Mom's skimmed smoothly over page after page.

It took Joanna twice as long as it should have, but finally she finished her assignment. She went into her bedroom to get the horse story she'd checked out of the library. But when she took the book from her bedside table, she bumped the snapshot of Sam and it fell to the floor. Quickly, she picked it up and carefully leaned it back against the lamp. She couldn't help

sighing as she looked at her brother. If only she could talk to Sam, for even a minute, so he could tell her if he was part of the quarantine—and so she could tell him she was sorry for the horrible things she'd said to him.

But there were no telephones on ships. The only way to talk to him now was by letter—and she'd promised she wouldn't write. She set her library book back on the table and looked at Sam's photo thoughtfully. Then she went to her dresser and opened the top drawer. She pulled the little pile of envelopes out from under her socks.

The most recent letter was on top and they were tied together with the pink ribbon Sam had wrapped around her radio when he'd sent it. Joanna slipped off the ribbon and took the envelopes to her bed. She opened the oldest letter first:

September 10

Dear Jo,

I wish you could see the **Pierce**! She's an amazing destroyer with an impressive history. I'm lucky to have been assigned to her. I've already met some nice guys and I know I'm going to do important work here and learn a lot. But I'll never be truly happy if you can't accept my decision. I hope you'll write soon and tell me you've forgiven me . . .

September 17

Dear Jo,

They're keeping us busy, but that's good because it helps me to miss Mom and you a little less. I like my work in the radio room, and I like the ocean. I confess I was a little worried that I might get seasick. After all, I'd never even seen the ocean before. Can you imagine how embarrassing seasickness would be for a sailor?

He had drawn a cartoon figure of himself with one hand holding his stomach and the other covering his mouth. Joanna giggled.

She read letter after letter.

September 21

Dear Joanna,

You would like my best buddy, Jakes. (That's his last name, not his first.) He comes from Kentucky and his family raises racehorses! He says sometime on leave I can bring you down for a visit. Wouldn't that be something? Someday we might even go to the Kentucky Derby!

October 1

Dear Jo,

I'm really sorry my decision to join the navy hurt you so deeply. But it's what I needed to do—for myself, yes. But for my country, and for you and for Mom, too. Please try to understand and write to me. You and Mom are the two most important people in the world to me. I hate to think that I've let you down.

Joanna stared at this letter. The one sentence always confused her. What did Sam mean, he'd joined the navy for Mom and her? She'd begged him *not* to go.

October 7

Dear Joanna,

I learned how to play a card game called cribbage. It's a lot of fun. Remind me to teach you how to play when I come home on leave.

I wish I could have left at a better time, when you wouldn't have to be alone so much. I know it can get pretty scary in that basement at night. There's so many weird noises

from the pipes and stuff. But Dixie will sound the alarm if there's anything to really worry about. And you can call Pamela's apartment. Her mom or dad would be there for you in a flash.

I'm still waiting for a letter, kiddo. I want to hear what you've been up to. Write, will you?

I have to hurry to my post now. I'll drop this in the mail chute on the way.

Give Dixie a pat from me.

Love,
Sam

Joanna reread the part where Sam talked about the apartment being scary at night. He sounded like even he had been frightened sometimes. But she couldn't quite believe that. He was probably just saying it to make her feel better. He'd sure never acted scared.

She began the last letter.

October 13

Dear Joanna,

We're doubling up on our exercises. Something must be up. Don't worry if you don't hear anything from me for a while. It just means we're doing some special maneuvers . . . and remember that I'm doing what I want to do.

Will you please get moving on a letter or two (or five or six) to me? I want to see if your spelling has improved.

Take care of Mom.

Love Always,
Sam

Joanna swallowed hard. This last letter had arrived less than a week ago, before all the trouble with Cuba started. When she'd read it then, she hadn't given much thought to the part about "something must be up" or the way Sam had signed the letter "Love Always" and told her to take care of Mom. Now suddenly everything in that letter took on another, darker meaning. Especially his reminder that he was doing what he wanted to do.

The hair on Joanna's arms stood up. She knew, as surely as she knew her name was Joanna, that the *Pierce* was part of the quarantine.

Mom had finished typing and was watching *The Red Skelton Show*. On a normal Tuesday night, Joanna would have been watching with her, laughing at the silly skits. But tonight wasn't a normal night. And Joanna had something important she had to do.

She sat down at the kitchen table with a fresh sheet of notebook paper and her pen. Then she took a deep breath and began to write.

October 23

Dear Sam,

How are you? I'm sorry I haven't written to you before. And I'm sorry I was so horrible to you when you left. I didn't mean what I said about you leaving like Dad did. I still don't really understand why you had to go, but you've always been the best brother in the world. You always do the right thing, so this must be right, too.

Ever since President Kennedy's speech I've been awfully worried about you. Things here are so strange. We had an air-raid drill at school today and somebody cried. It was creepy. A lot of grown-ups are scared, too, like Grandma and Mrs. Waterman. Mom says everything will be fine. I wish you were here to tell me what you think. They said on the news that there's going to be what they call a quarantine so our ships can keep Russian ships

from taking more weapons into Cuba. I hope you aren't part of it. There could be shooting!

Sherry Bellano is having a boy-girl party on Saturday night but Mom won't let me go. She says I'm too young for boy-girl parties! She's so unfair sometimes. I wish you were here to help me change her mind.

Thanks for the transistor radio. I listen to it all the time. No one else has one half as nice.

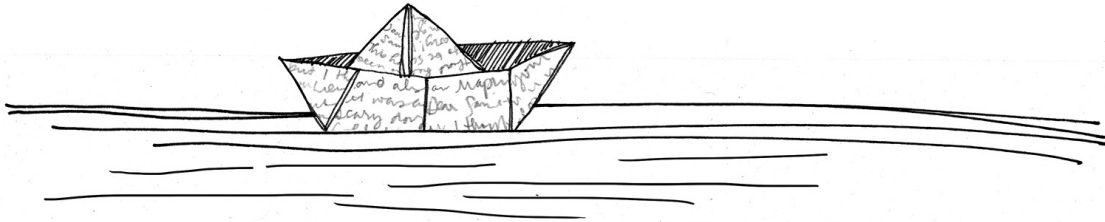
***Love,
Joanna***

PS I miss you!

Joanna read over her letter. She sat for a moment deep in thought. Then she added:

PPS I'm proud of you.

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Missed Opportunities

JOANNA WOKE UP EARLY THE NEXT MORNING AND TURNED on her radio. The news didn't start off much better than it had the night before.

"According to Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, as many as twenty-five Russian ships are presently on their way to Cuba despite the quarantine, which goes into effect this morning," the newscaster reported.

Twenty-five ships! Joanna wanted the newscaster to say how many ships were in the US quarantine, but he didn't. She hoped there were a lot more than twenty-five! Maybe it would say in the newspaper. She'd have to remember to check when she was at the Watermans' later. In the meantime, she listened to how America's delegate to the United Nations delivered a speech the night before that could have been a direct message to Khrushchev. He warned that Americans were patient but they were not afraid, and they would use their weapons if they had to.

Joanna groaned. Now she was more worried than ever. But it didn't sound as if Sam would be in any danger today, at least. And maybe Khrushchev would back down by tomorrow.

Before Mom left for work, Joanna asked her for an envelope and a stamp.

Mom's face lit up. "You wrote to Sam!"

Joanna nodded, cheeks burning. "How long does it take to get a letter to him?" She followed Mom to her bedroom, where she took an already stamped and addressed envelope from a box on top of her dresser.

Mom gave a tiny shrug. "It's hard to know for certain, but it seems like somewhere between five and seven days."

"That *long*?" Joanna cried.

"It will go by quickly, you'll see." Mom kissed Joanna's forehead before returning to the bathroom to finish combing her hair. Joanna looked at the

envelope in her hand and sighed. She had wasted so much time.

Pamela was full of her uncle Zach that morning. Uncle Zach said this and Uncle Zach said that. “Uncle Zach told us that he was actually the brother who fell for Mom first, but that Daddy—his dashing older brother—swept her off her feet. Isn’t that romantic?”

Joanna grinned. “Is Uncle Zach married?”

Pamela laughed. “No. He says he’s still pining away for Mom.” She clapped a hand to her heart dramatically.

Joanna was so interested in Pamela’s tales of romance that she nearly walked right past the mailbox on the corner. “Whoa!” she cried, and pulled Sam’s letter from her math book to poke it into the slot.

“Is that a letter to Sam?” Pamela asked.

“Yep.”

Pamela frowned. “I thought you promised you wouldn’t write to him.”

“I know,” Joanna admitted. “But with all that’s going on with Cuba, well, I just have to.” She dropped the letter into the mailbox. Soon the postman would pick it up and it would be on its way to Sam.

Joanna added, “He’s part of the quarantine. I just know it. He could be hurt and the last thing I said to him was so awful.” She gulped. “I needed to tell him I didn’t mean it. Besides, writing to him is the closest I can come to talking to him. And I really miss talking to him.”

Pamela nodded. She understood.

They stepped into the street and Pamela gestured at the small shop on the opposite corner. The sign out front said HILLYER’S GROCERIES, but everyone in the neighborhood just called it the corner store. “Remind me to buy milk on the way home, will you? We ran out at breakfast. Mom used the last of it to make French toast in honor of Uncle Zach. Did I tell you he climbs mountains for fun? And he’s traveled nearly everywhere—even Alaska!” And it was Uncle Zach, Uncle Zach, Uncle Zach the rest of the way to school.

The playground was fuller and noisier than it had been the day before. Almost back to normal. Kids were playing jump rope and tag. Balls were flying back and forth. A cluster of sixth-grade boys were showing off their yo-yo tricks. It was a much nicer start to the day than yesterday’s frightened huddles.

When Joanna arrived in her classroom, Carl and Billy were scuffling over a piece of paper. Theo swooped in and snatched it away from both of them just seconds before the bell. The looks of surprise on Carl's and Billy's faces made Joanna laugh. Theo bowed as if to thank her.

Joanna laughed again. She took a step toward him. This might be her chance to start a conversation about his horse, since it didn't look like she would be going to the party. But at that very moment Sherry breezed past her. "Theo!" she cried. "I just heard you have a horse! That's so cool. What's his name?"

Joanna stopped mid-step. Her stomach dipped and she gritted her teeth. If only she'd been faster! Now Sherry was the one Theo was beaming at and telling about his horse, Jasper. It wasn't fair! Sherry couldn't possibly love horses as much as Joanna did. But she would bet anything it would be Sherry who got to ride Theo's horse now, not her. More important, Sherry would be the one he danced with at the party. She'd be the one he'd be calling his girlfriend next week.

• • •

"Sherry has everything—two parents, great clothes, a summer cottage, boy-girl parties. She even has a *song* named after her! Why couldn't she leave just one thing for me?" Joanna moaned to Pamela on their way home that afternoon.

"Some people have all the luck," Pamela agreed. "And it's not fair!"

"Mom says life isn't fair, but I don't know why not." Joanna kicked so hard at a pile of leaves that she lost her balance and nearly fell over.

"Don't give up hope, Joanna. Even if Theo gives Sherry a ride on his horse, that doesn't mean he won't give you a ride, too."

"That's true," Joanna said, cheering up a little. "And maybe she doesn't even know how to ride!" She pictured Sherry trying to mount Jasper from the right side instead of the left, and shrieking in fear when the horse started to move. She imagined Theo groaning and wishing he'd never let Sherry anywhere near his horse.

"Oh gosh, I nearly forgot the milk!" Pamela said, veering back toward the corner store they had just passed.

A bell on the door tinkled overhead as they entered. The candy display case was straight ahead of them and the sight of it made Joanna's mouth water. She wished she had a nickel for a candy bar, or even a penny for some bubble gum. But as usual her pockets were empty. She forgot about candy, though, when she noticed that most of the store's shelves were bare.

"Where did all the food go?" she wondered out loud.

"Everybody's been loading up, what with all the war talk that's going on," a man's voice answered.

Joanna's attention flew to Mr. Hillyer, the owner, who was standing behind the butcher's counter. "Gosh," she said. "Mom and I didn't even think about stocking up." And it was too late now. The shelves had some paper napkins and mustard and catsup, some drinking straws and cake mixes, laundry detergent and cleaning products. That was all.

Mr. Hillyer grinned. "The store getting cleaned out was good for one thing, anyway. It got my wife to take the day off." He nodded so hard and happily, his white butcher's cap nearly tumbled off his head. He grabbed it with scarred fingers just in time.

"I have the whole place to myself today," he went on. "No one nagging me to dust the shelves since they're empty, or to scrub the floors and windows since we're so quiet. Nosirree, today it's just me and my radio and my paper." He gestured at both items on the counter. "Not that they're the most cheerful of company, you understand, what with all that's going on. Can you believe it? Those crazy Russkies could start a war that blows the whole world to smithereens!"

Joanna gulped. She felt Pamela stiffen beside her. All of a sudden Mr. Hillyer's gloomy expression vanished. He coughed and cleared his throat. Then he smiled extra wide and toothy. "By the way, what was it you two little ladies were after today?"

Pamela looked blank for a moment. Then she stammered, "Uh, m-milk. A gallon of milk."

His smile somehow stretched even wider. "Well, you're in luck. I just got a delivery from the dairy. Milk is one of the few things I have." He nodded toward the refrigerator case on the opposite wall.

Pamela went to get one of the glass jugs while Joanna wandered back to the front of the store.

Mr. Hillyer insisted that they both choose something from the penny candy case as a treat. Pamela chose a pretzel rod.

“You pick something now,” Mr. Hillyer prompted Joanna. She chose Bazooka bubble gum. He grinned. “Good choice. It lasts longer than anything else, even the suckers.”

Joanna nodded, popping the pink square into her mouth and stuffing the joke wrapper into her pocket to read later. They were turning to leave when suddenly he said, “Wait, girls. I wonder if you can you do me a favor?”

He lifted a brown bag from behind the counter. “You two live down on Maplewood, don’t you?”

They nodded.

He bobbed his head and grinned. “I thought I’d seen you thereabouts when I walk my dog. Anyway, there’s an elderly lady, a Mrs. Streng, who lives—”

“In our building,” Pamela cut in with a grin. “Twelve Thirty-nine North Maplewood.”

“Right!” He beamed. “She called and asked me to deliver some groceries. But with my wife out today, I haven’t been able to get away. Do you suppose you could deliver them for me? I’ll give you twenty-five cents.”

Pamela had the heavy jug of milk, so it was Joanna he was asking. And he was already taking a quarter from the cash register. She didn’t see how she could say no. “Uh, sure,” she said. “Thanks.” She tucked the quarter in her pocket. Then she shifted her books to one arm so she could carry the grocery bag in the other.

“She’ll appreciate it if you carry them inside for her,” he called as they were going out the door.

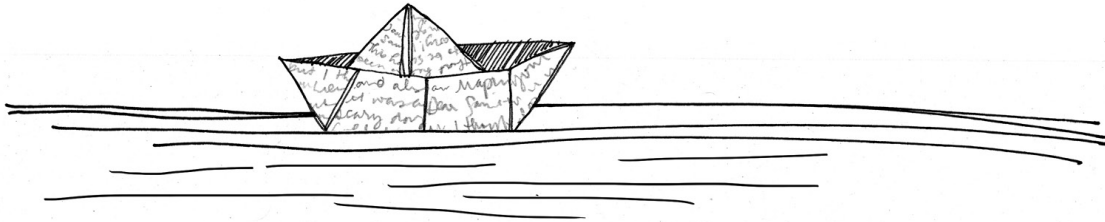
But at their building Joanna declared, “I don’t care what Mr. Hillyer said, I’m not going inside that apartment. I’ll leave the bag on the mat.”

“The main thing is they’re here,” Pamela agreed. “She can take them inside herself.”

Joanna set the bag on the doormat. Then she poked the doorbell. Pamela ran up to her apartment and Joanna raced downstairs to walk Dixie.

But before the outer door swung all the way closed behind her, she heard Mrs. Streng’s creaky voice calling, “Wait! Come back!”

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CHAPTER 9

Uncle Zach

“I NEVER RAN SO FAST IN MY LIFE!” JOANNA TOLD PAMELA when they were setting the Watermans’ dining room table an hour later, after another steamy session with *The Book*. “I nearly swallowed my bubble gum! And I burst through our door so fast, I scared Dixie!”

Pamela thunked a plate onto the lacy tablecloth. “Well, I don’t blame you one bit for being scared! It’s creepy the way Mrs. Streng keeps trying to get you to come close to her.” She shivered. “Ugh!”

Joanna followed Pamela around the table, putting a folded napkin—cloth, not paper—beside each plate. They were eating in the dining room in honor of Uncle Zach. Mrs. Waterman had even bought a bouquet of real flowers for the center of the table—a mix of pink roses, purple irises, and white baby’s breath. She had arranged them in a crystal vase. It was beautiful.

Joanna lined up a plate more evenly with the edge of the table and sniffed the air like Dixie when she smelled bacon cooking. “Ahhh . . . I love your mom’s pot roast.”

“Chocolate cake for dessert, too,” Pamela reminded her, as if Joanna was likely to have forgotten. She had seen it cooling on the kitchen table when she arrived.

Joanna was putting extra napkins back in the sideboard when she heard voices and footsteps coming up the stairwell. A few seconds later, Marie entered the apartment, laughing. Her father and uncle were right behind her. “Oh, don’t tease. He wasn’t that bad,” Marie said between giggles. “He’s just a little stiff yet.”

Uncle Zach’s slow, one-sided grin reminded Joanna of the Marlboro Man. “The way you flutter those eyelashes of yours at him will loosen him up, I imagine,” he said.

Marie giggled. “Shame on you, Uncle Zach. I’m just being *nice*.”

Her uncle raised his eyebrows. "Is that what you call it? In my day we called it flirting. I guess times have changed, huh, George?"

Mr. Waterman raised his eyebrows right back. "Seems so."

"Honestly!" Marie shook her head. "You're both impossible!" But she had a smile on her face as she headed to her room.

Pamela waved a handful of forks. "Hi, Daddy. Hi, Uncle Zach."

Mr. Waterman blew her a kiss and waved to Joanna. "Hi, girls."

Uncle Zach said, "Hi, sunshine. Who's your friend?"

Pamela's face turned pink. "Oops! I'm sorry. Uncle Zach, this is my best friend, Joanna Maxwell. She lives downstairs. Joanna, this is my uncle Zach."

Uncle Zach smiled broadly and extended his hand. "It's nice to meet you, Joanna Maxwell."

Joanna flushed. She'd never shaken hands with a man before, but she put her hand into his bigger, warmer one and stammered, "N-nice to meet you, too."

Mrs. Waterman appeared in the dining room doorway, drying her hands on a kitchen towel. "Oh, good! You're home. How was rehearsal?"

"Entertaining, right, Zach?" Mr. Waterman said with a laugh.

Uncle Zach grinned. "Extremely."

Mrs. Waterman opened her mouth as if she was going to ask them to tell her more, but Mr. Waterman was already turning away and heading into the living room. "Find a comfortable chair, Zach," he told his brother. "I'll tune in the news."

"Must you?" Mrs. Waterman asked, a pinched look appearing around her eyes.

Mr. Waterman frowned. "Honestly, Gloria, we can't just be ostriches and bury our heads in the sand." But then he added kindly, "Why don't you go back in the kitchen where you won't hear anything. I promise you we'll turn off the TV right after the news."

Mrs. Waterman looked at him for a long moment. But in the end she turned and left the room.

"Women," Mr. Waterman said with a wave of his hand. "They get so worked up."

Joanna stared at him, surprised and a little disappointed he would say such a thing. She was glad when Uncle Zach said, "I don't know. Seems to

me being upset is a pretty reasonable reaction to what's going on."

Mr. Waterman sighed. "You're right, of course. It's a mess. I just hate to see Gloria so frightened. Her imagination always runs away with her."

"She's an artist," Uncle Zach pointed out. "Artists have vivid imaginations."

"Mom's not an artist anymore," Pamela chipped in, tossing her last fork in the general direction of a plate and pulling Joanna along with her to the couch. "She hasn't painted in weeks."

Uncle Zach shook his head at her. "Whether she paints or not, your mother is still an artist," he said firmly. "She sees and feels things differently than we do. More deeply."

The television had finally warmed up and an image was taking shape on the screen. Joanna leaned forward, crossing the fingers on both hands. Maybe there would be good news. Not like in the newspaper.

The *Chicago Daily Tribune* had been lying open on Mr. Waterman's chair when Pamela went to the bathroom earlier. The enormous photograph on the top half of the page had grabbed Joanna's attention. It was taken from an airplane looking down on Cuba, and labels pointed out "Missile Launchers" and "Missile Trailers" on the ground below.

Lower on the page it said that the Russians were calling the quarantine a step to war and were readying their troops. A headline on the second page said:

**RAID ADVICE:
'TAKE COVER—
THEN PRAY'**

Joanna had dropped the paper back on the chair. She'd seen enough.

Surely the television news would be more hopeful. But when Walter Cronkite's face appeared, he was wearing such a gloomy expression Joanna had to fight an urge to run to the kitchen and hide with Mrs. Waterman. Nothing was better. And the first ship would reach the quarantine the next day.

The news ended and Mrs. Waterman called them to the table.

“Gloria, this is straight from heaven!” Uncle Zach gestured at the table. “The flowers, the food—I haven’t seen or smelled anything so wonderful in years.”

Mrs. Waterman blushed. “Thank you, Zach.”

For a while everyone was silent as they enjoyed the delicious pot roast and roasted carrots and potatoes. But after a few minutes, people started talking between bites, and midway through the meal Marie asked, “Where will you live in Paris, Uncle Zach?”

“I’ll stay in a hotel until I find an apartment,” Uncle Zach replied. “I know what I want, though: something not far from the Seine and the Louvre—with a bakery just around the corner and a marvelous restaurant just up the street.”

His brother laughed. “Those are your only qualifications, hmm?” He looked at Mrs. Waterman. “Can’t you just see him scouring Paris for the next six months in search of this dream apartment, Gloria?”

Mrs. Waterman’s smile spread upward until it reached her eyes. “Yes, I can see him,” she said. “And I can see the apartment, too. It will have tall ceilings and narrow windows, and a balcony that overlooks a sidewalk cafe. And one of the other tenants will play the violin very softly late at night.” She shook her finger at Uncle Zach. “Don’t you dare give up looking until you find it.”

His eyes were fixed on her face, which was glowing the way it always did when she talked about Paris. “I won’t,” he said solemnly. “I promise.”

Mr. Waterman groaned. “Honestly, Gloria, you’re worse than he is. Don’t encourage him! He’ll be living in a hotel forever.”

“No, he won’t,” Mrs. Waterman said. “Wait and see.” Then she went to the kitchen to bring out dessert.

“Ah, my favorite!” Mr. Waterman cried when he saw what she brought back. “Chocolate cake like you’ve never tasted before, Zach. Give him a big piece, darling. Let him see that all the good bakers aren’t in France.”

Mrs. Waterman laughed and cut a fat slice for Uncle Zach. When he tasted it, he closed his eyes and sighed. “A dessert worthy of the gods.”

“Be thankful Mom isn’t painting anymore,” Pamela teased. “If she were, it would be a bakery cake instead of homemade—if she remembered to go to the bakery.”

Everyone laughed, Mrs. Waterman hardest of all. “I lose all track of time,” she confessed.

“Artists can’t punch a time clock,” Uncle Zach defended her.

Marie shrugged. “Well, we like her better this way—a normal mother who remembers to cook supper and has time to make great desserts—right?” She looked across the table at her sister.

Pamela nodded, her mouth too full of cake to speak.

Mrs. Waterman murmured, “I forgot the coffee,” and went back to the kitchen.

She returned and was filling coffee cups when Marie cleared her throat. “You know, I’ve been thinking, Mom. The sunroom would make a great bedroom.”

Mrs. Waterman looked as startled as Joanna felt. “You want my studio?”

“Well, you’re not using it anymore, so why shouldn’t I have it?” Marie turned to her father. “Don’t you think that’s fair, Daddy? After all, the room’s just going to waste.”

His eyebrows knotted together. “I’d hardly say the room is being wasted, Marie. Your mother is just taking some time off . . .”

Marie thrust out her lower lip. “It’s been months! And all that time I could’ve had a room of my own instead of being crammed in with an adolescent who doesn’t respect my privacy or belongings.” She glared at Pamela.

“I haven’t touched anything of yours in ages!” Pamela cried. She was so indignant, Joanna was sure she’d forgotten about The Book.

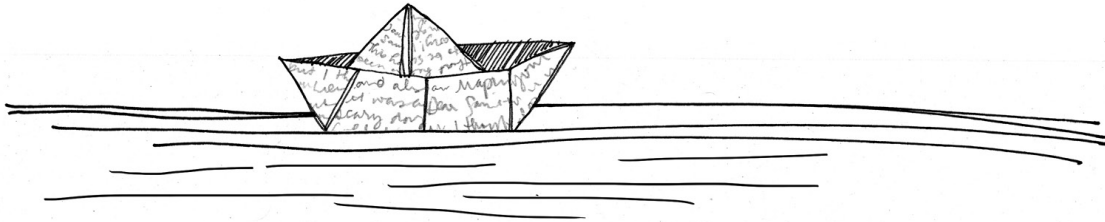
Joanna expected Mr. Waterman to tell Marie to hush, but instead he looked at Mrs. Waterman. Did he think Marie was right? Joanna looked at Mrs. Waterman, too. She waited for her to tell Marie to stop being a brat. But Mrs. Waterman didn’t say a word. She just stood abruptly and started stacking dirty dishes.

“Gloria, you haven’t finished your cake,” Mr. Waterman protested.

“I’m too full to eat another bite right now,” she said brightly. “I’ll have it later.” She took the plates to the kitchen. A scowl flashed across Uncle Zach’s face but Joanna didn’t know who he was angry with—Marie for making trouble, Mr. Waterman for not putting a stop to it, or even Mrs. Waterman for just walking away without telling Marie not to be silly, of course she couldn’t have the sunroom.

The last bites of Joanna's cake stuck in her throat. Marie had ruined the end of a terrific dinner. "Thanks a lot!" Joanna wanted to tell her. Instead, she grabbed her own plate and followed Mrs. Waterman to the kitchen. She got there just in time to see Mrs. Waterman fling her slice of cake into the garbage, and—before she turned quickly away—to see the tears shining on her cheeks.

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A Terrible Argument

THEY WERE AT THE ART MUSEUM—JOANNA, PAMELA, AND Mrs. Waterman—looking at the miniature houses. “Look at the teeny-tiny silverware and candlesticks,” Joanna said to Pamela, but Pamela was already drifting ahead.

Reluctantly, Joanna moved away from the case to catch up with Pamela and Mrs. Waterman at the next display, but they weren’t there. Joanna hurried around the corner, but they still were nowhere to be seen, and neither were the miniature houses.

Joanna was suddenly in a small gloomy room. “Pamela? Mrs. Waterman?” she called. But no one answered.

Somewhere behind her, a door quickly opened and closed. Heavy footsteps came toward Joanna. “Who’s there?” Joanna called in a voice that squeaked.

“Are you lost, little girl?” a growly voice asked as a rough hand grabbed her arm.

“No! Let me go!” Joanna cried. “Let me go!”

The door swung open again and footsteps hurried toward them. “I told you never to talk to strangers, Jo!”

“Sam! Help me!”

“I can’t. I’m late for the quarantine.” His footsteps kept going. “Go home.” His voice and footsteps faded.

“Sam! Sam, stop! Come back!”

Joanna woke up, heart pounding wildly, with Sam’s name on her lips. She must have cried out during the dream. Dixie had her front paws up on the edge of the bed. Her head stretched forward and she licked Joanna’s hand.

Joanna patted Dixie’s head. “Good girl, Dix. It’s okay. Go back to sleep. I’m okay.”

But long after Dixie was sleeping again, Joanna lay awake in the dark.

• • •

When she woke up the next morning, Joanna heard Mom washing up in the bathroom and coffee perking in the kitchen. She sighed. Last night's dream was the weirdest one yet. Sam had been gone and come back, only to leave all over again! And he'd scolded her—something the real Sam hardly ever did.

Joanna pulled the covers up to her chin. The nightmares were getting to her. It was bad enough to be scared during the day because of the Russians and their missiles. Now she was being frightened in her sleep, too!

"Joanna? Time to wake up," Mom called from the kitchen.

Joanna fought an urge to pull the covers over her head. "I'm awake," she called back. But she groaned into her pillow before she threw back the covers and sat up. She frowned at her radio. Did she really want to hear the latest news? She hesitated, watching the second hand glide halfway around the face of her clock, before she snapped on the radio.

She was glad she did, too, because for once the news wasn't awful. Only one Russian ship could possibly reach the quarantine that day. Only one. *Possibly*. Russia wasn't going to start a war with just one ship. Joanna was sure she'd float all the way to school that day.

"Dress warm," Mom advised. "It's going to be cold. It may even snow today!"

Snow in October! Joanna's heart gave a happy skip.

"Did you hear? It might *snow* today!" she greeted Pamela a little while later.

"Isn't it strange?" Pamela eyed the gray sky.

Joanna sighed. "Everything is strange lately. But at least this is *good* strange."

Pamela nodded. She tugged the zipper on her jacket higher. "Brrrrr."

Joanna shivered as the wind blew up her skirt. "It's not fair that boys can wear pants but girls have to wear skirts and freeze."

"That's for sure," Pamela agreed.

“And it’s not fair that grown-ups get to make all the decisions all the time and we kids are just supposed to do as we’re told,” Joanna huffed.

“I know!” Pamela nodded vigorously. “They treat us like babies.”

Joanna suddenly giggled. “They’d have fits if they knew what we’ve been reading.”

Pamela laughed. “I’ll say.” She gave Joanna a meaningful look. “We’re sure not babies anymore.”

Joanna grinned. It was true. Together, they’d learned some amazing things in the past few days. The Book had taken them way beyond the romantic kisses of movies. It described things that married people—and sometimes *not* married people—did in private. Thinking about it made Joanna’s breaths come faster. Then she thought of Theo. Did he know these things, too? Her cheeks burned in spite of the frosty breeze. What would it be like to kiss him? She tried to imagine it.

“I never thought I’d be grateful to Marie for anything,” Pamela said, “but I’m sure glad she brought home that book.”

Joanna blinked away the vision of Theo’s face coming toward hers. “Me too,” she squeaked. Suddenly she felt light, almost happy. “Today is going to be a good day,” she said. “It may snow, only one ship can possibly reach the quarantine, and we have gym.”

“Ooooh—I almost forgot!” Pamela cried. “Do you think we’ll play dodgeball again?” Gym was the one class the girls had together.

“I hope so!” Joanna skipped a few steps. “Hey, look,” she said a minute later, gesturing at the houses ahead. Overnight, many of them had sprouted flags. Mr. Hillyer’s store had one, too. One of the articles in yesterday’s *Tribune* had been titled “Flying of US Flags Urged During Crisis.” A lot of people seemed to have taken the message to heart. Joanna was glad. It gave her a good feeling to see those flags waving and to hear them snapping in the wind. They made her feel proud—and safer, too, somehow.

As they crossed the street, Pamela said, “Oh, I nearly forgot to tell you. My aunt Carol is coming for supper with the twins tonight so they can see Uncle Zach before he leaves tomorrow.”

“So no friends over after school today, huh?” Joanna guessed.

“No, you can come,” Pamela said. “You just might have to leave earlier than usual.”

“I’ll come as soon as I walk Dixie and I’ll leave as soon as they arrive,” Joanna promised. “Just so we have time to read more of The Book. That’s all that matters.”

• • •

When Pamela opened the Watermans’ door that afternoon, Joanna knew right away that something was different, but it took her a moment to identify what it was. When she did, she smiled. The scent of turpentine was in the air.

A quick glance revealed Mrs. Waterman in her studio, painting and Uncle Zach watching from a bench a few feet away.

Pamela rolled her eyes at Joanna. “Mom’s painting again, so Marie is pouting in the bedroom.”

“Didn’t she have play practice today?” asked Joanna.

“No. She just had costume fittings. You should’ve seen her face when she saw Mom painting!” Pamela laughed. “She stomped all the way into our room and slammed the door.” Her grin turned down on one corner. “But that means no chance to read The Book today after all.”

Joanna shrugged off her disappointment. “Is it okay if we watch your mom paint for a minute? I want to see if the lady in the painting is looking into or out of the window.” Mrs. Waterman never minded if they watched her paint and it always fascinated Joanna to watch each stroke of the brush leave behind one more tiny part of whatever picture was taking shape on the canvas.

“You go ahead,” Pamela said. “I’ll pour us some milk and see if there’s any leftover cake for a snack.” She went off to the kitchen.

Mrs. Waterman and Uncle Zach were talking as Joanna approached the sunroom. She heard Uncle Zach say, “. . . not too late.” Mrs. Waterman’s green-tipped brush paused in midair as she stared at him. Then she must have heard Joanna coming, because she suddenly spun around. “Oh—Joanna! Hello.”

Joanna stopped. She felt as if she’d interrupted something, but it couldn’t have been anything very important, because Uncle Zach was

grinning at her and so was Mrs. Waterman, though her cheeks were unusually pink. “Is it all right if I look at your painting?”

“Of course it is,” Mrs. Waterman said. “Come and take a look. It’s still not finished. But almost.”

Joanna walked around the easel. Gosh! Mrs. Waterman must have been painting all day. Now it was clear that the woman in the painting was looking out a window at a street scene—but not just any street scene. “It’s Paris!” Joanna cried, recognizing the Eiffel Tower in the background.

“Yes,” Mrs. Waterman said, her voice suddenly soft. “It is.” She turned to beam at Uncle Zach and he beamed back.

Joanna looked at the picture again, admiring the brilliant blues and vivid reds in the sky and flowers. She would love to be an artist someday. “It’s beautiful,” she said.

Mrs. Waterman’s gaze snapped back from Uncle Zach as if for a moment she’d forgotten Joanna was there. “I-I’m glad you like it,” she said, her cheeks more pink than ever. She tugged off the paint-spattered shirt she was wearing over her sweater and skirt and glanced at her watch. In a fluttery voice she said, “I’d—um—better start dinner or it will be midnight before we eat.” Then she gave a sharp little laugh and rushed out of the room. Joanna, after an uncertain grin at Uncle Zach, followed her to the kitchen.

While Mrs. Waterman started the oven and peeled potatoes to cook with the chicken already in the roasting pan, Joanna and Pamela split the last slice of chocolate cake and gulped down glasses of milk. They were just finishing when Mr. Waterman arrived home. Mrs. Waterman hurried to greet him.

Joanna expected him to say something about the fact that she was painting again. Surely he smelled the turpentine, too, and he’d want to see the work she’d done. But he didn’t say anything except “Hello, dear.” Mrs. Waterman returned to the kitchen more slowly than she’d left and slid the pan of chicken and potatoes into the oven. Then she took off her apron and walked back to the living room. Their snack finished, Joanna and Pamela followed her.

“Let’s watch *American Bandstand*,” Pamela suggested.

They were barely to the dining room, though, when raised voices from the living room made them stop. A few feet ahead of them Mrs. Waterman

halted, too.

“It’s Kennedy’s fault we’re in this mess,” Uncle Zach said as he sat down on the couch. “The Russians never would’ve been so bold if the Bay of Pigs invasion hadn’t been bungled so badly.”

Mr. Waterman was in his chair, an unopened newspaper in his hands. “That wasn’t all Kennedy’s fault. He—”

But Uncle Zach cut him off. “He’s the president. *Everything* is ultimately his fault. He even allowed the Berlin Wall to go up. Why shouldn’t they believe he’d look the other way when they put missile launchers on our back doorstep? They see him as weak because that’s the image he’s earned.”

“Well, they’re wrong!” Mr. Waterman snapped. “And he’s proving that now. He’s not backing down this time, and they’d better understand that, because if they don’t, we’re going to end up blowing the whole world and everyone in it straight to—”

“*George!*” The horror in Mrs. Waterman’s voice made Joanna cringe.

Mr. Waterman whirled around. He looked startled to see her standing just a few feet behind his chair. He stood up quickly. “I’m sorry, Gloria, I didn’t realize you were there.”

“But you believe it can happen, don’t you?” she demanded in a shrill voice. “All this week you’ve been telling me not to worry, that it will never come to a war, but you’ve just been telling me what you knew I wanted to hear. And all the while you’ve really been thinking there might be a war—one that could be the beginning of the end of the world!”

“Gloria, for God’s sake, hush! You’re frightening the kids.”

“*I’m* frightening them?”

Joanna had never heard Mrs. Waterman sound so angry.

Mr. Waterman went around his chair to her. “I’m sorry,” he said. “I got in a political discussion with Zach and I forgot myself for a minute. I got carried away and said things I don’t really believe. This whole mess is going to work out just fine, hon. Trust me.”

“And how am I supposed to do that now, George? Just because you say so? Am I supposed to blindly believe whatever I’m told? Do you really see me as such a child?” Mrs. Waterman’s voice had gotten quieter. More controlled. But no less angry.

“No, of course not!” Mr. Waterman sounded honestly sorry, but a little exasperated, too. He put one hand on her shoulder. His voice softened. “But you can make an effort to think positively, can’t you? Concentrate on practical everyday things—meals and housework and the girls—and this will pass.”

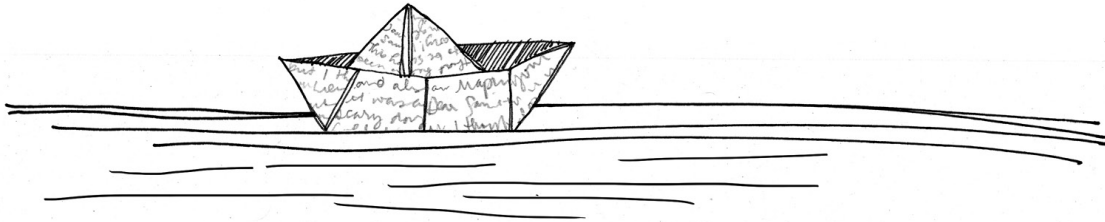
Mrs. Waterman’s back stiffened. “*Practical everyday things?*” she repeated. She shook off Mr. Waterman’s hand. “Can’t you see I’m already *drowning* in practical things? If the bomb doesn’t kill me, *practicality* will!”

Mrs. Waterman whirled around and rushed past Pamela and Joanna. The Watermans’ bedroom door slammed. Joanna was left staring at Mr. Waterman. She took a sideways step out of his way, because she expected him to follow Mrs. Waterman. She was surprised when instead he just pressed his lips together and frowned at the bedroom door. Then he drew himself up straighter, spun stiffly on his heel, and returned to his chair. Uncle Zach looked on with one eyebrow raised in a thoughtful expression.

The air felt thick with anger, and Mrs. Waterman’s words seemed to hang in it instead of fading away.

“I should go home,” Joanna said softly, snatching her jacket from the back of a dining room chair and thrusting her arms through the sleeves.

Pamela didn’t argue. She nodded and opened the front door. “See you tomorrow,” she whispered.



Joanna Takes Action

AS JOANNA PLODDED DOWN THE OUTSIDE STAIRS, **SHE** suddenly got an idea. Instead of going down to the basement, she trotted to the large shed behind their building. Swiftly, she dialed the combination to the padlock on the door, and she entered the musty space where each apartment had its own small storage area. People stored Christmas decorations, cardboard boxes, window fans, outgrown toys—and bicycles.

Joanna steered her bike outside. It was probably the last chance she'd have to ride until next spring. Maybe a good, fast bike ride would help blow away the discomfort she felt after seeing Mr. and Mrs. Waterman argue.

"Let's go, Thunder," she whispered.

When she was younger, she had pretended that her bike was a beautiful black horse, like Black Beauty, or Fury from the TV show. And he was wild—so wild, no one else could ride him. Only Joanna, because he loved her. Pamela's bike-horse had been a palomino she named Lightning. Together, the two girls had ridden Thunder and Lightning through imaginary canyons and valleys and fields on one adventure after another. Which was a bit of a miracle considering that at one point it seemed like Joanna would never learn how to ride a bike at all.

Sam had taught her so many things—how to swim and roller-skate and whistle, how to hit a baseball, bait a fishhook, make a triple-decker sandwich, and build the best snowman for blocks around. It never occurred to either of them that he wouldn't be able to teach her how to ride a bike. Joanna sped down Maplewood, laughing under her breath at the memory.

She was seven the day Sam watched her riding her bike and asked if she was ready to take off the training wheels. Joanna was all for it. Everyone knew training wheels were for babies. She wanted to burn rubber—go so

fast that when she hit the brake the tires would squeal and leave a squiggly line of black on the sidewalk.

“Hurry up. Take ’em off,” she told Sam, perching on the front steps to watch.

He got the wrench and went to work. Soon the training wheels were lying on the sidewalk and for the first time her bike actually needed its kickstand in order to stay upright. Feeling very grown up, Joanna shoved the kickstand up with her foot. Then she climbed on her bike, all set to take off. But as soon as she settled herself on the seat, the bike started to tip. She caught herself with one foot and scowled. If she couldn’t sit on the bike without falling over, how was she supposed to ride?

Sam gave her ponytail a tug. “Don’t worry. You just need a little help getting started.” He walked behind her and gripped the back of the bike. “I’ll give you a push to get you going,” he said. “Once you’re rolling you’ll be fine. You ready?”

She nodded. “Ready.”

“Go!”

She went. But she was barely past the front of their building when the bike started to wobble. Frightened, Joanna jerked on the handlebar. The bike swerved left. It rolled off the sidewalk and bumped over the grass toward a station wagon parked at the curb. In her panic she forgot about the brakes. She shrieked and jerked the handlebar sharply to the right. The bike stopped, teetered in place for a few heartbeats, then toppled over.

“At least the grass made a soft landing,” Sam said when he stood Joanna up and brushed her off.

She nodded. Her hip hurt where she’d fallen on it and she was afraid she’d cry if she opened her mouth.

That was just the first of many losing battles she and Sam fought with her bike that spring. Battles that left Sam discouraged, Joanna scraped and bruised, and poor Thunder scratched and dented. Joanna began to wish she’d never seen a bike. Everyone else in the world was able to ride one except her. And every time she tried and failed, she got more scared.

Until one day, when she and Pamela were about to play hopscotch, Tommy Nagel, from the next block over, came riding up on the smallest bike she’d ever seen. It was half the size of hers. Tommy braked hard just

before he reached them and skidded to the edge of the game lines they'd just drawn on the sidewalk with a piece of chalk.

Pamela yelled, "Hey, watch out!"

But Joanna had forgotten the hopscotch game. She was staring at Tommy's bike. Even she could ride something as small as that! She was sure of it.

"Can I try your bike?" she begged.

Looking at her put the sun in his eyes. He shaded them with one hand and squinted up at her. "Don'tcha got one of your own?"

"I just never saw one so small before," she said. "I want to see what it would feel like to ride it." Her heart thumped with excitement. She could ride this bike. She knew it. He *had* to let her.

Tommy shrugged. "I guess. But only to the corner and back. I got things to do."

Joanna nodded. "Right."

He stood up and offered her the handlebar. She took hold of it and straddled the bike. Right away she felt different. In control. On her own bike she could only touch the ground with the very tips of her toes. But on this bike she could rest both feet flat. Without giving herself time to think, she pushed off and began to pedal. The bike rolled forward—without a wobble, without a tip, without a crash.

She pedaled faster. Houses flashed past on one side of her, parked cars and trees flashed past on the other. She pumped her legs harder and the bike spurted ahead even faster. The wind rushed past her ears and lifted the hair from the back of her neck. Flying! It was like flying!

Joanna returned Tommy's bike and ran straight to the shed to get Thunder. She climbed on and rode off as if she'd been doing it all her life. The fear that had always gone with her before had vanished.

She and Pamela rode bikes together all that afternoon. They were still riding when Sam came home from his job ushering at the neighborhood movie theater. The look on his face when Joanna whizzed up and burned a trail of rubber in front of him was priceless. First he grinned. Then he laughed. Then he clapped his hands and whistled loud and shrill through his fingers.

Joanna remembered the details of that day as clearly as if they'd happened hours ago instead of years. She could close her eyes and see the

sun glinting off the handlebar, hear the thrilling squeal of her tires, and smell the buttery popcorn aroma that clung to Sam when he hugged her. She had never felt so proud of herself.

Joanna smiled, remembering it all as she sped around their block over and over until the streetlights went on. Then, out of breath but calmer, she put her bike away and went home, where she curled up on the chair next to Sam's navy photo.

"Mr. and Mrs. Waterman are usually so happy," she told him, just as if he really were beside her. "It was awful seeing them so mad at each other." She hunched forward and propped her chin in one hand. "And Mrs. Waterman looked so *scared* about what could happen with Cuba." Joanna frowned thoughtfully. "Mom isn't scared at all. Of course, Mrs. Waterman is more sensitive than Mom, her being an artist and all. But it scared *me* seeing her so upset."

She looked hopefully at the photo. The navy's Sam looked sternly back at her.

What would he tell her to do if he were here? What would *he* do? She frowned and tried to imagine it. He wouldn't just sit around worrying, that much was certain. He would *do* something.

An idea had been forming in the back of her mind ever since she'd walked into the corner store yesterday. Now it came clear.

Joanna went to her bedroom and pulled out everything that was on the floor of her closet—boots, an old pair of sneakers, a too-small pair of patent leather dress shoes, and a stack of board games—Monopoly, Clue, checkers and Chinese checkers. She shoved all of it across the floor and under her bed.

Then she went to the pantry and took stock of what was on the shelves. Not much—a box of crackers, two boxes of cereal, some cans of soup, a box of macaroni and cheese, canned vegetables, canned tuna, a can of salmon, canned peaches, and a brand-new jar of peanut butter. Half a box of raisins, a jar of applesauce, salt, and a bottle of vinegar—yuck! A nearly empty bag of sugar and another of flour. That was all.

Joanna sighed but she got right to work taking armfuls of all of the canned goods to her closet. She also took the raisins, the peanut butter, and the box of crackers. She left the cereal for tomorrow's breakfast and she shifted the remaining items around so hopefully the shelves wouldn't look

quite so empty. Mom was always in such a hurry that with any luck she wouldn't even notice things were missing.

Next, Joanna looked for containers with lids. Mom saved jars from Miracle Whip and applesauce and cans from coffee, too. The jars were good for storing leftovers in the fridge, and the cans with their plastic lids were great for storing cookies.

There were three empty cans and five jars, all sparkling clean and lined up neatly on the shelf above the refrigerator. Very carefully Joanna stood on a chair and took them down one by one. Then she took them to the sink and filled each of them with cold water. Finally, she carried them to her closet and stood them up along the back wall. There! Drinking water.

Dixie had been watching Joanna's comings and goings from her favorite spot, under the kitchen table. But she came into the bedroom while Joanna was organizing the cans and jars and poked her head under Joanna's arm.

"Well, hello!" Joanna laughed. She scratched behind Dixie's pointy ears while she thought about what else she might need in her bomb shelter. Suddenly she looked at Dixie and gasped. "Ohmygosh, Dix! I nearly forgot *your* food!" She scrambled to her feet and hurried back to the pantry.

Luckily, Dixie's bag of kibble was still half full. It would last a while. And there was a nearly full box of dog biscuits, too. "We might end up sharing these, Dix," Joanna said, only half joking. If they did end up using this makeshift bomb shelter, she had no idea how long they might have to stay in it. How long did radiation stay around? Days? Weeks, maybe?

She took the extra quilt and pillow from the chest in Mom's room and made a sleeping nest for Dixie and herself on the floor of the closet. Looking at the cans of food again, she suddenly realized that she'd forgotten she'd need a can opener—and a spoon would be good, too. And a flashlight! Joanna quickly added these items to the closet.

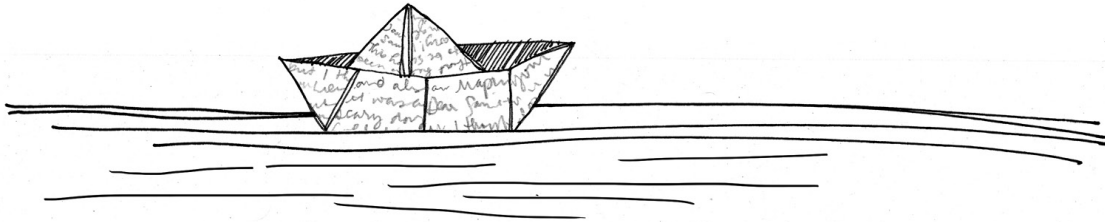
The last thing Joanna added to her bomb shelter was the packet of Sam's letters. She tucked them under the pillow. There. She was as prepared as she could possibly be if they were attacked. She'd just have to grab her radio on her way in so she could listen to emergency broadcasts.

Joanna hoped with all her heart that Mom would be home if war broke out. There was room enough that they could both snuggle inside her closet with Dixie if they had to. Mom would be glad then that she had thought to

prepare for the worst. But with Mom gone so much of the time, it was much more likely Joanna would be alone.

It was a terrible thought. But it was true.

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Keeping Sam Safe

JOANNA MADE THE BOX OF MACARONI AND CHEESE FOR supper. She ate while she listened to the news, which wasn't good. Russian ships were still headed for Cuba. If they didn't alter their course, they would reach the US ships quarantining the island tomorrow. She tried hard not to think of what would happen when the ships came face-to-face. Would the Russian ships turn away? Or would they attack the US ships that blocked them? And what would happen to Sam if he was there?

He would be okay, she told herself. He *had* to be okay.

She'd finished her homework and was watching *Dr. Kildare* when Mom came home. Joanna snapped off the TV and followed her to the kitchen. While Mom reheated the macaroni and cheese, Joanna dropped into a chair at the table. She had to at least try to convince her mother.

"Mom, could we both please stay home tomorrow?"

Mom turned from the stove with a startled expression on her face. "Stay home? Whatever for?"

"Because tomorrow's when the Russian ships will reach our ships. It's when maybe there'll be shooting. And maybe—"

"Joanna, darling, stop." Mom held up her spoon. "I can't afford to miss a day of work, and you can't afford to miss a day of school." Mom turned back to the stove and vigorously stirred the pot.

Joanna wanted to say, "If war starts, at least we'll be together!" But she knew her mother would only tell her she was scaring herself and not to think about such things. How could her mother *not* think about such things?

• • •

Later, when Joanna was in bed and very nearly asleep, she heard something that made her stiffen. It sounded like someone was crying. She raised

herself on one elbow and listened harder. Yes, someone was definitely sobbing. And it sounded like they were nearby—probably upstairs with Mrs. Streng, the secret Russian spy! Could she have kidnapped that little blond girl after all?

Abruptly, the crying stopped.

A chill skittered up Joanna's back. Nobody stopped crying that fast. The cries had been silenced by something—a hand, or maybe a pillow! Joanna held her breath and strained her ears, but all she could hear was her own fast-thumping heart. Maybe she should go tell Mom. No. She would say Joanna had been dreaming. Or that she was imagining things. Again.

Joanna slid back down on her pillow and tried to go to sleep. But it wasn't easy.

• • •

Mom and Joanna were at Oak Street Beach. The scratchy green army blanket marked their space on the sand, and their towels and shoes held down its corners. Mom didn't usually go in the water, so Joanna was surprised when she followed Joanna out farther and farther into the chilly waves.

"How come you came in the water today?" she asked her mother.

"Because I don't want to leave you alone," Mom replied.

"But you leave me alone all the time," Joanna reminded her.

"That's why," Mom said.

Joanna puzzled over Mom's answer as she squinted across the surface of Lake Michigan. It was dotted with sailboats and motorboats and even a few really big boats Sam had told her were called yachts. Most of the boats were close to shore, except for the big yacht that was coming over the horizon. Coming really fast.

She touched Mom's arm, then pointed. "Look at that big yacht."

Mom looked. Then she gasped. "Ships!"

As Mom said the word, Joanna saw that it was true. This was no graceful yacht. It was an enormous steely gray ship. The Pierce! And it was flanked by smaller ships. And steaming toward all those ships was a cluster of other ships that were painted bright red.

Artillery blasts from the red ships shook the air. They slammed into the side of the Pierce, ripping terrible holes into its steel flesh. Joanna heard wails and cries and shouts. Then there was a huge explosion and the whole side of the ship burst open, like a potato that wasn't pricked with a fork before it was baked. Men came spurting through the opening into the water. Some tried to swim away, but more of them disappeared quickly under the waves.

Sam? Where was Sam? Joanna knew without a doubt he was nearby. The only question was whether he was alive or if he'd been swallowed by the lake. No. He had to be alive. And she had to find him. But Mom was pulling her back toward shore. "Come with me, Joanna. Hurry!"

"No. Let me go! I have to save Sam!" Somehow Joanna shook off Mom's hands. The next moment she was in a rowboat, scanning the water desperately for Sam. There! She saw him. He was swimming toward a big yellow raft—the inflatable kind made out of rubber. As she watched, more rafts blossomed like lily pads in the water.

Joanna yelled, "Over here, Sam!" because she knew if he came to her, he'd be safe. She knew this the same way she knew that if he got on that raft, he wouldn't be. But he headed for the raft. When he reached it, he flung one arm over the side and started to climb in.

Bullets blasted—bam, bam, bam, bam, bam! They tore into the raft. It shriveled and in seconds Sam was left clinging to a useless piece of rubber. Bullets smacked the water all around him—bam, bam, bam, bam!

"Sam!" The word gurgled out of her throat and woke her up.

The radiator was banging—bam, bam, bam.

For once Joanna wasn't relieved to wake up from a nightmare. Her dream had ended before she could save Sam. She was safe, but she couldn't shake the awful feeling that he wasn't. Her mouth was dry. Her heart was pounding so hard, she thought she might be having a heart attack. And every time she closed her eyes, she saw bullets blasting around Sam.

Finally, she sat up and flung back her covers. Maybe a drink of water would help put the horrible dream behind her. She gasped as her feet hit the cold floor. Dixie, curled up on her little rug, raised her head sleepily, then sighed and put it down again.

When Joanna opened her bedroom door, she noticed the living room light was on. Water forgotten, she detoured to the living room, where Mom

had fallen asleep hugging the framed photo of Sam. Joanna noted with a jolt of surprise that there were tear stains on her cheeks.

Gently she touched her mother's shoulder. "Mom?"

Mom jerked awake. "What's wrong?" She looked anxiously left and right.

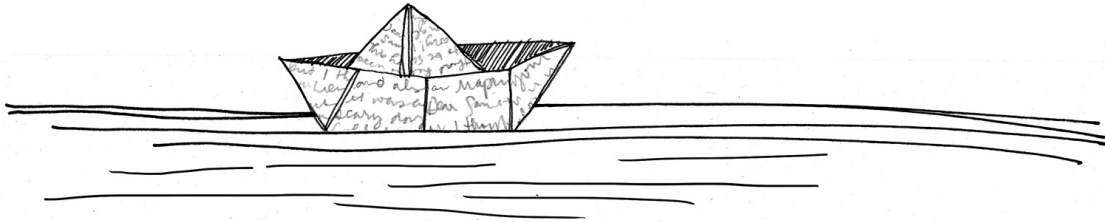
"Nothing. Everything's fine," Joanna told her quickly. "You fell asleep on the couch, that's all."

Mom's body relaxed. She nodded. "I just meant to rest my eyes for a minute." She started to sit up and realized she had the picture frame in her arms. A tender look crossed her face as she lifted it and then, very carefully, set it back in its place on the end table.

She rubbed her arms. "Brrr. It's cold. Thanks for waking me. I'd have been an icicle by morning." She snapped off the lamp and guided Joanna down the hall in the circle of her arm.

Joanna forgot to get her drink of water, but by the time she climbed back into bed, her heart had stopped its furious thumping. When she closed her eyes, she didn't see Sam in the water anymore. She saw Mom asleep on the couch, hugging Sam's picture to her heart.

Keeping him safe.



Air Raid!

“THE WORLD WATCHES AND WAITS TODAY AS

RUSSIAN ships continue on their course toward Cuba. There is speculation that the ships that turned back since the quarantine went into effect are those that were carrying forbidden materials, and that those that have remained on course are carrying innocent cargoes, but that remains to be seen . . .”

Knowing how sneaky the Russians were, Joanna could imagine them expecting the United States to think exactly this way so they could catch the ships off guard, like they had in her dream last night. Joanna trembled just thinking of it, so she tried hard not to.

“So, is your dad sad that Uncle Zach is leaving today?” she greeted Pamela, determined to steer conversation away from Cuba right from the start.

Pamela laughed. “He told him good luck with finding an apartment and to watch out for French women.”

Joanna grinned. “Wouldn’t it be cool if he was still living there when we’re older? Then maybe we could save up our money and go visit him.” She waggled her eyebrows. “We could meet French boys. Ooh-la-la!” They both dissolved into giggles.

After that, the rest of the way to school, if one of them showed signs of stopping laughing, the other one just had to waggle her eyebrows or say “Ooh-la-la!” to start her up again. By the time they arrived at school, Joanna’s stomach hurt from laughing. But even laughter couldn’t keep her thoughts from straying back between ooh-la-las to what might be happening in the waters off Cuba.

That morning the girls in Joanna’s class were all talking about Sherry’s party. It was as if Cuba and the Russians didn’t exist. Or maybe talking about which records they’d play and what boys were coming were *their*

ooh-la-las—their way of not thinking of things that were too scary to think about.

Joanna knew she should tell Sherry she wouldn't be coming to the party, but she couldn't bring herself to do it in front of the other girls. She'd catch her alone later. If there *was* a later.

Joanna was heading to her desk when Theo suddenly appeared in front of her. "Hi," he said. This morning his eyes were like the deepest, bluest part of Lake Michigan. For a moment, Joanna felt herself floating into them. She had to yank herself back. "H-hi."

Theo shuffled his feet. "I was, uh, wondering if you've heard anything from your brother—the one in the navy."

Joanna sighed. "No. All I know is he's in the Atlantic on a destroyer named the *Pierce*. And since they're sending so many ships to the quarantine, his might be one of them."

Theo shook his head slowly. "You must be awfully worried about him."

Joanna nodded hard. "I'm having horrible nightmares." The words just popped out. And then they kept on coming. "Sam's my only brother, and he's the best guy you'd ever want to meet. I-I couldn't stand it if anything happened to him." She stopped abruptly and looked down at her feet, embarrassed that she'd shared so much. All he'd wanted to know was if she'd heard from Sam. He didn't want to hear all her deepest fears.

But Theo's feet took a step closer to Joanna's. "He'll be okay, Joanna. You'll see." His voice was low and sympathetic. Joanna couldn't help looking up.

She tried to smile. "Yeah. That's what I keep telling myself."

Theo nodded quickly. "You have to think positive."

"That's exactly what Sam would say!" Joanna did smile then.

Theo looked pleased. He knew that was a compliment. Mr. Egan entered the room and Theo backed away toward his desk, grinning. "See you tomorrow night at Sherry's party."

The party! Joanna groaned. Why couldn't things ever go right for her? And on top of everything else, it was Slop Class day.

Every Friday, right after they said the pledge, while the boys got to make neat things like bookends and birdhouses in shop class with jokey Mr. Lions, the girls had to make nasty things like milk toast and rice pudding in the home economics classroom with Mrs. Stubbins. And what was worse,

they had to *eat* everything they made. *Ugh!* Girls long before them had nicknamed the whole disgusting experience Slop Class, and the name was still a perfect fit.

When Mr. Egan told the girls to line up that morning, he was treated to the usual chorus of groans and he responded with his usual frown of disapproval. But he didn't scold. He never did on these occasions. Which suggested to Joanna that somewhere deep down he felt sympathy for them. Not enough to keep him from sending them to home ec, though. Joanna joined the scraggly line that trudged miserably down the hall.

"Okay, girls, let's take our seats quickly," Mrs. Stubbins clucked, clapping her hands to hurry them along. "We have a lot to do and no time to waste." Mrs. Stubbins, who obviously enjoyed eating as much as cooking, waddled over to shut the door. She nearly closed it on an office messenger. She read his note and quickly shooed him on his way. "We're going to make egg on a raft today," she announced. "Won't that be fun?"

Joanna and her two tablemates—Debbie and Frannie—rolled their eyes at one another.

Mrs. Stubbins demonstrated everything they were supposed to do from her table at the front of the room. When she finished, she looked them over like a sergeant reviewing her troops. "Any questions? No? Then go to your kitchens and begin."

Joanna's sigh blended with those of a dozen other girls. Feet dragging, she followed Frannie and Debbie to their assigned "kitchen" at the back of the room. Each of the four cooking areas had a stove and a sink and a small refrigerator.

"I'll get the stuff from the fridge," Debbie offered.

Frannie nodded. "I'll get the frying pans."

"And I'll get the bread." Joanna got the loaf from the bread box and counted out three slices.

Each girl plopped half a tablespoon of margarine into a frying pan and turned on the burner beneath it. Joanna cut a circle in her slice of bread with the top of a juice glass and laid it in her sizzling pan. Then she cracked her egg carefully into the hole.

While they waited for the eggs to cook, Frannie and Debbie whispered about what they were going to wear to Sherry's party. Joanna pasted a smile on her face and pretended to be listening, but really she was thinking how

odd it was that after last night's dream about Sam, she was making something called egg on a raft.

That really had been a horrible dream. Seeing poor Sam with the shreds of the yellow raft in his hand . . . ! And those bodies that had been blown into the water from the holes in the side of the ship. She'd nearly forgotten that part of the dream, but now that it came back to her, she remembered even more. She saw all those hurt and dying men in the water. She saw Sam with bullets pelting the water all around him . . .

The bell shrilled.

Joanna froze. Beside her, Frannie and Debbie froze, too.

The bell wasn't supposed to ring now.

It blasted for what seemed like forever. Finally, it stopped just long enough for a babble of voices to break out. Then it shrilled again. Air raid!

Joanna's heart exploded into wild pounding. Something must have gone wrong at the quarantine! Her nightmare was coming true. The terror of it swelled inside her all over again. Sam! Mom!

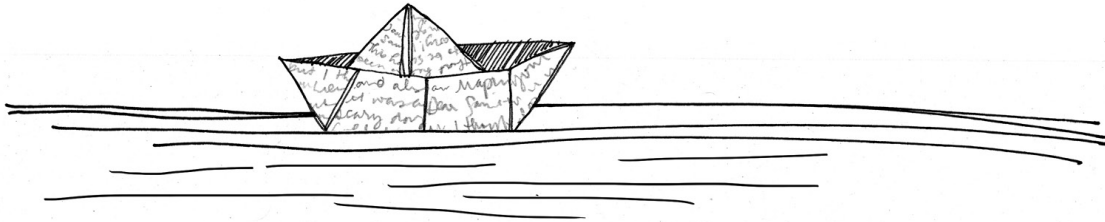
"Girls, turn off your burners!" Mrs. Stubbins shouted over the bell. She kept shouting directions, but the girls were squealing and the bell kept ringing. It was impossible to hear anything.

Joanna imagined Mrs. Stubbins was telling them to put dirty utensils in the sink to soak before they left. That's just the way her mind would work. The building could be bombed but the dishes should be clean! Well, Joanna didn't care about dirty dishes. And she sure as heck didn't want to be with Mrs. Stubbins when bombs started falling!

Joanna was near the door. She was through it in a flash. But she didn't turn left and start a line against the wall. She turned right and dived down the stairwell.

The Russians were attacking! She wasn't going to huddle on the floor of the hallway with her hands over her head.

She was going home.



Because of Harvey

JOANNA EXPECTED TO HEAR PRINCIPAL OWENS OR MRS. Stubbins behind her, shouting, “Stop! Come back here! You can’t leave now!” But if they were, she couldn’t hear them over the long blasts of the bell. The kids and teachers she glimpsed at each floor were too busy lining up in the hallways to notice her flying around the corners of the stairway. She went down, down, and out the door without one person trying to stop her.

Outside, Joanna looked up. She thought she might see planes swarming overhead, like in her nightmare. But the sky was empty. That could change any second, though. Planes traveled fast. Missiles traveled even faster.

She sprinted through the school yard entrance and down the street. Past houses. Past Mr. Hillyer’s store and the mailbox on the corner. Past more houses. Home was just ahead.

By then, Joanna’s legs were almost too heavy to lift and every breath scraped through her lungs like sandpaper. The only thing that kept her going was picturing herself bursting through the front door, scooping up Dixie, and whisking her to the closet.

But when she finally staggered to a stop at her building, she didn’t plunge down the steps to the basement the way she’d imagined. She was halted by the sight of an almost all-black cat stumbling blindly around the side of the building with a tuna can stuck on his face.

“Harvey!” she gasped with what little breath she had left. “What did you do to yourself?” He tried to meow in response, but it came out as a muffled *merrrr*.

Stupid cat! Joanna glanced upward. The sky was still empty. She squatted down to remove the can. But when she tried, Harvey yowled in pain. Blood trickled down his cheek. She saw then just how serious his situation was. He’d managed to get his nose caught under the jagged edge

of the lid and the more he tried to get free, the more he hurt himself. “Poor stupid cat,” Joanna murmured softly. “You really did a job on yourself.”

She looked down the basement stairs. Home was just a few steps away. But she couldn’t leave Harvey out here like this. She glanced up again. The sky was still clear. For how much longer, though? There was no time to waste. She’d run Harvey upstairs, ring Mrs. Strengé’s bell, and leave him on her doormat just like she’d left that bag of groceries. She’d be downstairs with Dixie in less than a minute.

Joanna gathered Harvey in her arms and climbed as fast as she could up the front steps. Just as she pulled open the heavy outer door, the door of the first-floor apartment opened and Mrs. Strengé appeared, dressed in a coat and leaning on a wooden cane. Joanna was so startled, she nearly dropped Harvey.

“Oh—you found him! Thank you!” the old woman cried. “I was just going out to look for him. He was gone so long, I knew he must have gotten into some sort of mischief. And I was certainly right! Just look at him.”

Hearing his mistress’s voice, Harvey tried to meow but with even less success than before. It came out sounding more like a moan of pain.

“I tried to take the can off, but it’s stuck and it’s cutting him,” Joanna explained in a rush. All she wanted was to hand over Harvey and scurry downstairs, but the cane left Mrs. Strengé with only one free hand. How could Joanna thrust the cat into the old woman’s arms when she really only had *one*? Yuck! There was that nasty smell again.

The wrinkles in the old woman’s face deepened. “Poor old fellow.” She stroked the tiny patch of white on the cat’s forehead. “But you’re safe now, thanks to Joanna.” As if he understood every word she’d said, Harvey somehow managed to purr.

But Joanna’s mind spun. “H-how do you know my name?”

Mrs. Strengé laughed. “I’m a bit crippled, but I’m not deaf. I hear you and Pamela calling to each other all the time.”

Joanna felt foolish. Maybe she’d been wrong. Maybe Mrs. Strengé really was just an ordinary old woman. But then she remembered the blond girl . . .

There was no time to think, though. Mrs. Strengé was on the move, hobbling back a step. “If you’ll just carry Harvey inside for me, I’m sure that together we can get that can off in no time.”

She turned and walked slowly into the apartment, the tip of her cane thumping against the wood floor. Not knowing what else to do, Joanna followed, but she left the door open a crack so she could get out quickly if she had to.

Something about the cane's thumps was familiar. By the time Joanna reached the living room, she realized what. The noises she'd thought were made by a prisoner trying to signal for help—they'd been the sounds of Mrs. Strenge's cane rapping against the floor! Joanna's cheeks burned. She really had let her imagination run away with her. But still, there was the little girl. Joanna hadn't imagined her. Why had she run away crying?

The nasty odor was stronger in the living room. When she got closer, Joanna realized it was coming from an open jar on the coffee table. She could only see part of the label—FOR RELIEF OF JOINT PAIN. Not poison. Medicine. Joanna sighed.

The old woman winced painfully as she eased herself into a stuffed chair. She didn't look like she could hurt anyone. She certainly couldn't chase after them. Very carefully, Joanna set Harvey on her lap. Before she could turn and leave, though, Mrs. Strenge looked up at her.

"There are clean washcloths in the bathroom," she said. "Would you please wet one with cold water and bring it to me? And would you bring me a fork from the kitchen, too?"

Didn't Mrs. Strenge realize they were under attack? Or was she so determined to help Harvey that she'd forgotten?

Desperate to get out of the first-floor apartment and into her own, Joanna hurried through the dining room. Nothing scary there. Just a stack of Green Stamps and the books to paste them into. Joanna's mother collected Green Stamps, too. She got them nearly everywhere she shopped. And when she filled enough books, she traded them in for something they needed, like a new iron, or a set of casseroles, even a vacuum cleaner once.

Joanna ducked into the bathroom long enough to snatch a washcloth and run it under the cold water faucet. Then she hurried into the kitchen, where she was jolted by the sight of Girl Scout Cookie boxes stacked on top of the refrigerator. It brought her earlier fears back in a rush. She had to get out of this place! She plucked a fork from the drawer next to the sink and scooted back to the living room.

“Help me hold him still, dear, would you?” Mrs. Strenge asked as she took the fork. Joanna’s feet itched to be going, but how could she say no? She placed her hands gently but firmly on either side of Harvey’s head.

The knuckles of Mrs. Strenge’s hands were horribly swollen, and her fingers curled so they looked like claws. Joanna didn’t see how she could manage to open a jar or even a doorknob. It had to be painful and take forever. It was no wonder her hair was usually a wild mess. She probably couldn’t handle a comb or brush, and she surely couldn’t manage bobby pins.

She watched Mrs. Strenge try to slide one of the fork’s prongs under the jagged edge of the lid, but twice the fork slipped from her hand. The first time, it fell into her lap. The second time, it clattered onto the floor.

Joanna picked it up. “Let me try,” she said. The old woman nodded gratefully. Carefully, Joanna caught the lid with one prong of the fork and raised it just far enough that Harvey was able to pull himself loose.

He shook his head, then rubbed his face in Mrs. Strenge’s lap, clearly delighted to be rid of the can that had been holding him prisoner.

“Oh, thank you, Joanna!” Mrs. Strenge cried. She pressed the washcloth to the cut on Harvey’s cheek. But Harvey’d had enough. He leaped from her lap and raced out of the room.

The old woman shook her head and laughed. “Ungrateful little wretch!” She turned back to Joanna. “But truly, dear, it was lucky for Harvey and for me that you decided to play hooky today.”

“Hooky? Oh, no, I came home because of the air raid,” Joanna explained.

“Air raid?”

“Yes. They rang the bell at school—” For the first time Joanna realized that a radio in the corner of the room was quietly playing music. If they were being attacked, shouldn’t there be a message telling listeners to tune to the emergency station?

“Oh no!” Joanna said, clutching her head with both hands. “I’m going to look like such an idiot!”

“What did you do that’s so awful?” Mrs. Strenge looked puzzled.

“It was just a *drill*!” Joanna cried. “I thought it was a real air raid and I ran home to be with Dixie.”

“Home is where you should run when there’s trouble,” the old woman said.

Joanna groaned. “The other kids and my teachers won’t think so.”

“You’ll explain. They’ll understand.” Mrs. Strengé sounded very sure.

“I hope you’re right.” Joanna sighed. She gave the old woman a lopsided smile. “At least we’re not at war.” That was an enormous relief. But she still wanted to get out of this apartment as fast as she could. The cookie boxes in the kitchen had raised her fears about Mrs. Strengé all over again. What if she was a Russian spy and was sending secret messages to the Kremlin about how the Americans were reacting to the crisis? Maybe there were hundreds of Mrs. Strengés planted all over the country, looking out their windows and listening at their doors. She turned to leave.

“Could you just turn off the radio before you go?” Mrs. Strengé asked. “I think after all this excitement I may be ready for a little nap.”

Joanna hurried across the room, but then she stood and stared. There was a photo next to the radio. A blond girl—*the* blond girl—smiled at her from a fancy silver frame. “Who’s this?” she asked, trying not to sound as startled as she felt.

“That’s my daughter’s child, Elizabeth,” Mrs. Strengé said, a note of pride in her voice. “She’s my only grandchild. I used to live with her and her mother. But my daughter recently remarried and they moved to Ohio. I miss them terribly. Especially Elizabeth. She calls me on the telephone every Sunday, but it’s just not the same.”

“I know what you mean,” Joanna said. “My brother, Sam, just joined the navy and he’s going to be gone for a whole year. I miss him something awful.” She switched off the radio and turned around in time to see Mrs. Strengé wipe a tear from the corner of her eye. “Is there anything else you need?” Joanna added softly.

“A promise perhaps?” Mrs. Strengé suggested.

Joanna blinked. “Sure. What kind of promise?”

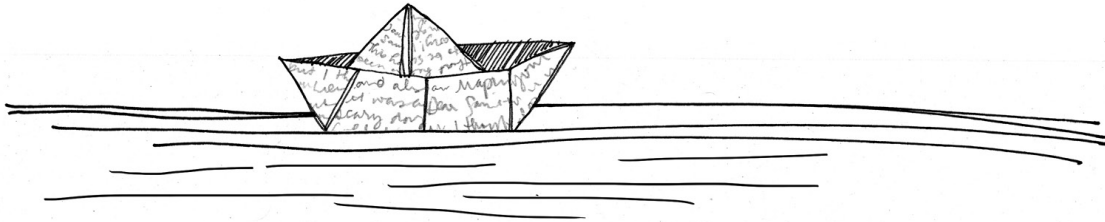
“That you’ll come see me sometimes. I get lonely, and the company of a lively young girl like you would be a real treat.” She smiled. “If it weren’t for Harvey, I’d even ask you to bring that cute little dog of yours.”

Joanna laughed, imagining Dixie chasing Harvey around the apartment. “I’ll come. I promise.” She’d been such an idiot! Mrs. Strengé was just a

nice, normal, *lonely* old lady—not a spy or a kidnapper or any of the other crazy things she had imagined.

She sighed. There was no point in putting it off. “I’ve got to go back to school now.” She gave Mrs. Streng a grim smile and squared her shoulders. “I’m going to be in big trouble.”

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Facing the Music

THE WALK BACK TO SCHOOL SEEMED TO TAKE FOREVER, especially without her jacket. Now that Joanna wasn't running, she noticed how cold it was. The only thing that warmed her was the thought that if she hadn't run home, she wouldn't have been there to help Harvey, and she wouldn't have finally gotten to know Mrs. Streng. But imagining what the other kids and her teachers would say when they saw her made her feel as if she were heading into a firing squad.

What a baby they must think she was! Billy would probably make siren noises and yell, "Run for cover!" every time he saw her now. Theo would never talk to her again. She'd be in trouble with Mr. Egan and Mrs. Stubbins and maybe even Principal Owens—and it was all Mrs. Stubbins's fault!

Why hadn't she warned them about the drill? That note the messenger had brought her at the beginning of class must have been about it. But Mrs. Stubbins hadn't said a word. She didn't care if a dozen girls got scared half to death. All she cared about was her stupid egg on a raft!

The playground was empty. Joanna crunched across the gravel and slipped through the door. Then she ran up the stairs two at a time. Kindergarteners were singing "The Eensy Weensy Spider" on the first floor, and a door closed far off on the second, but she didn't see a soul. She just smelled coffee wafting down the hall from the teachers' lounge. It was a homey, comforting smell, and suddenly more than anything she wished she could have a cup and add milk and sugar like Mom let her do sometimes on weekend mornings in the winter.

Her feet got heavier as she neared the third floor. Joanna had never been in any trouble at school before. Her mouth was dry. Her throat was tight.

The door to her classroom was open. Mr. Egan was talking about prepositions. Joanna took a deep, shaky breath. She let it out and started

into the classroom just as a bell rang. Recess. She back-stepped quickly into the hallway to avoid being trampled.

Her classmates were so eager to put distance between them and the parts of speech, most of them charged past Joanna with barely a glance. A few of the girls shot her questioning glances, but Frannie was the only one who stopped.

“Where’d you go? Are you okay? I was worried about you,” she said.

Joanna’s cheeks burned. “I thought it was a real air raid. I ran home.” She rolled her eyes. “Stupid, huh?” She hung her head.

“Not stupid. Brave!”

“Wha—?” Joanna’s head snapped up. Was Frannie making fun of her? But no, there was real admiration on her face.

“Before Mrs. Stubbins got around to telling us it was a drill, Sherry and a bunch of other girls started crying. All I wanted was to go home, too,” Frannie confessed. “But I was way too scared to actually do it. I was afraid I’d get hit by a bomb or something.”

Suddenly, at the same instant, they both burst into laughter. Joanna wasn’t even sure why. It wasn’t as if bombs and air raids were funny. But, oh, did laughing feel good!

“Miss Maxwell? Do you have something you’d like to say to me?” Mr. Egan stood in the doorway.

The girls’ laughter died abruptly. Frannie shot Joanna a look full of sympathy and hurried after the rest of the class. Joanna gulped and said, “Yes, sir,” in a small voice.

Mr. Egan gestured for her to come into the classroom and sit in a front desk while he leaned back against his own. “I was on my way downstairs to the office to call your mother, Joanna. I was worried about you. Mrs. Stubbins says you left the classroom without permission and then left school grounds completely during the air-raid drill.” Mr. Egan shook his head. “Those are very serious offenses, Joanna. What do you have to say for yourself?”

Joanna bit her lip. “I did leave . . . but only because I didn’t realize it was a drill. I thought it was a real air raid, and I wanted to be with my dog and—”

Mr. Egan raised a hand to stop her. He was frowning. “Mrs. Stubbins didn’t tell your class there would be a drill?”

Joanna shook her head. “No, sir. So when the bell rang, we all got really scared. But I got the most scared of all, I guess, and all I could think was that I wanted to be home.”

“I see,” Mr. Egan said quietly. He looked at her for a long moment, but with an expression more thoughtful than angry. “Why do you suppose you were more frightened than the other girls?” he asked finally.

Joanna’s voice came very softly. “I don’t know.” She traced a heart carved into the wooden desktop with her finger, unable to meet her teacher’s gaze.

Mr. Egan was silent for what seemed like a long time. Finally he said, “Your brother is the young sailor, right?”

Joanna pressed harder on the carving, but she looked up to say, “Yes.”

Mr. Egan tugged on his purple striped tie, making it crooked as well as ugly. “I imagine you’re worried about him.”

“Yes.” Joanna wrote S-A-M inside the heart with her fingertip.

“Have you talked to your mother about your fears, Joanna?”

“A little,” she said. “But she’s so brave herself, she doesn’t understand. She tells me everything will be fine and not to worry.”

Mr. Egan walked around to the back of his desk and sat down. “I think we can overlook this incident in light of the extenuating circumstances and your fine behavior in the past, Joanna. But I want you to make me a promise.”

She forgot the heart and looked up at him. Anything!

“I want you to promise me that you’ll tell your mother what you did and that you’ll talk to her about your fears—and really try to make her listen. Will you do that?”

That was all? Joanna couldn’t believe it! She nodded hard. For the second time in less than an hour she said, “I promise.”

• • •

“And that was it?” Pamela said. “No punishment at all?”

“That was it.” Joanna shuffled her feet through the leaves that were ankle deep under the maple tree in the middle of their block. “I couldn’t believe it.”

“Wow, he’s way nicer than he looks,” Pamela said.

“Mmmhmmm,” Joanna agreed. “Just like Mrs. Strenger.”

“I can’t believe you actually went into her apartment!” Pamela marveled. “I would’ve been way too scared.”

“It turns out Mom was right. I was letting my imagination run away with me.” Joanna laughed. “But it was sort of fun, wasn’t it?”

Pamela grinned. “Yeah. I’m gonna miss all the creepy stories we imagined about her.” She frowned. “Hey, there’s our car. Dad’s home early. I hope he didn’t catch the flu. He was just saying the other day that it’s been going around the high school like wildfire.” She made a face and started up the front stairs. “Guess I’d better go up and see.”

“I was thinking we could take Dixie for a long walk today,” Joanna called after her. “Want to?”

Pamela turned around. “Can I hold the leash?”

Joanna grinned. “Yes, you can hold the leash.”

“Great! I’ll see you in a little while.” Pamela waved and trotted up the stairs.

Joanna walked Dixie to the empty lot as usual, but then she took her straight back home. “We’re going to go for a nice long walk,” she said. “We just have to wait for Pamela, okay?” Dixie wagged her tail. Whatever Joanna said was fine with her.

They were playing ball when the phone rang. It was Pamela. “I can’t come down today after all,” she said. “I have to stay home.”

“Oh.” Joanna was disappointed, but curious, too. “Is your father okay? You sound funny.”

“I have to go now, Joanna. I’ll talk to you tomorrow.” And before Joanna could even say good-bye, Pamela had hung up the phone.

Golly, that was weird! Maybe Mr. Waterman didn’t have the flu after all. Maybe something really awful had happened—like he lost his job or he hit someone with his car or was in trouble with the police.

Joanna stopped herself and laughed out loud. Mr. Waterman in trouble with the *police*? She was doing it again—letting her imagination run wild. Probably he did have the flu and Mrs. Waterman wanted Pamela to sit with him while she went to the drugstore for some medicine. And Pamela was pouting about having to stay home. That was all.

“Looks like it’s just you and me, Dix,” Joanna said.

But Dixie had found an old bone to gnaw on and didn't even twitch an ear at the sound of her voice. It looked like Joanna was on her own.

She could get an early start on her homework, she supposed. But homework reminded her of Mr. Egan and her stomach did a slow somersault. It had seemed like an easy enough promise when she made it. But now she was starting to worry. How could she explain things to Mom so she'd understand? Mom would be angry that Joanna had broken school rules.

Joanna would have to find just the right moment to tell her.

She wandered into the kitchen and the sight of the empty table gave her an idea. She'd have supper all ready for Mom when she came home. That would be sure to put her in a good mood. And toward the end of the meal, Joanna would make her confession.

Pleased with her plan, she darted around the kitchen, looking over the contents of the pantry and the refrigerator. Tomorrow was grocery-shopping day, so there wasn't a lot to choose from. But eventually she put together a better than average meal—a not-too-wilted salad, canned peaches, and tuna sandwiches—even though it meant taking back two of the cans she had stored in her closet.

Next, Joanna set the table. She made sure to use glasses that matched and she folded the paper napkins into triangles with perfectly even edges. At the last moment, she took Mom's little violet plant from the windowsill and set it in the center of the table. There!

She had put bread in the toaster and was just heading into the living room to turn on the news when Mom arrived. "Oh my goodness," she said when she saw the table.

Joanna grinned and dashed over to push down the button on the toaster. She'd listen to the news on her radio later. "You just sit down and relax," she told Mom.

Mom sat. She grinned. "You know my birthday isn't until April, right? And Mother's Day isn't until May."

"Does it have to be a special day for me to do something nice for my mother?" Joanna said, feeling more guilty than ever.

"Of course not. I was just teasing. You're a darling to surprise me this way."

Joanna squirmed. It didn't seem right to be praised for something she'd done for selfish reasons. Now she wished she didn't have to tell her mother about the air-raid drill. She wished this could just be a be-nice-to-Mom dinner without any ulterior motives. But she had promised Mr. Egan.

Mom loved the dinner. She ate every last bite of everything. The timing was never going to be better. Joanna cleared her throat. "Uh, Mom? There's something I have to tell you."

Mom cocked her head expectantly. "You sound awfully serious."

Joanna bit her lip. "I, um, did something you're probably not going to like."

Mom's eyebrows puckered together in a tiny frown, but she looked more curious than anything. "I'm sure it can't be anything all that awful." She patted Joanna's hand. "Tell me."

So Joanna told her mother about the air-raid drill that didn't seem like a drill, about running home to be with Dixie, and about finding Harvey and taking him to Mrs. Strenge.

"And after I helped her with Harvey, I realized that her radio was playing music, so there *couldn't* be an attack and it must have been just another drill." Joanna had talked so fast she had barely stopped for breath, but she took a deep one now, before she said, "That's when I knew I was in trouble."

Mom's "My goodness, Joanna!" made Joanna hurry to add, "So I rushed back to school and told Mr. Egan what I'd done, and he said I wasn't in any trouble but that I had to promise to talk to you about how scared I've been feeling lately—since even before the trouble with the Russians."

"Oh, sweetheart," Mom said, reaching over to touch Joanna's cheek. "I'm sorry. I know you've been frightened, but I hoped if I made light of things, you'd feel better. Obviously I was wrong." She sat back in her chair. "Can you tell me now? I promise to listen."

Joanna fidgeted with her fork. Now that Mom was listening, what more was there to say? "It's just what I've been saying all along, I guess." She looked at Mom sideways, too embarrassed to face her all the way. "Lately lots of things scare me. And that was even before all the war stuff started. Now I have horrible nightmares about Sam every night, too."

"Do you think maybe you've been frightened because Sam is gone?" Mom asked gently. "You've never been on your own so much before."

Joanna frowned. She knew she'd been scared more and more since Sam left, but she'd never thought of it being *because* he had left. "I don't know . . . maybe . . ."

"I know I was scared to death when your father left," Mom confided.

Joanna stared. "I can't imagine you afraid of *anything*."

Mom gave a soft laugh. "I'm scared lots of times. I've just learned not to show it. But back then—well, I hadn't learned much of anything yet. For days I just sat around crying and waiting for him to come back. I wouldn't believe he was really gone. Until finally I had to. You and Sam were depending on me. So I went out and got my first job. Remember Mother Goose Nursery School?"

"Are you kidding? I loved that place." Joanna grinned. "They had the greatest toys."

Mom grinned, but then she cupped Joanna's chin in her hand and looked right into her eyes with a suddenly serious expression. "The point is, I did what I had to do. I didn't let my fear hold me back. Just like you didn't when you helped Harvey and Mrs. Streng."

Joanna chewed her lower lip. She understood what Mom was saying, but still . . . she didn't feel one bit braver than she had before.

She watched her mother stack plates and gather up silverware. As she turned to take the dirty dishes to the sink, Joanna suddenly blurted, "I just wish you weren't going to night school."

Mom stopped mid-turn. "It's not forever, Joanna. By January I'll have my diploma and I can get a job that will pay enough to get us out of this basement and into the sunlight. You'd like that, wouldn't you?"

"You mean it? We might move?" Joanna was excited and scared at the same time. It would be great to live in a nicer place, but she didn't want to leave Pamela or change schools. "Where would we go?"

"The Camerons are talking about buying a house next spring. If they do, we might be able to rent their apartment."

Right next door! "That would be perfect—there's even a backyard for Dixie."

It was all they talked about while they cleaned up the kitchen. The Camerons' apartment had a sunroom like the Watermans'. Mom said it could be Sam's room when he came home on leaves. She said it as if there wasn't the tiniest doubt in her mind that Sam would come home safely.

Joanna knew better since she'd found Mom asleep with Sam's photo in her arms. Mom was just as worried about Sam as Joanna was. But staying positive and hopeful—even just pretending to—was much better than giving in to fear.

Frannie had said that Joanna was brave to leave school when she thought they were being attacked, and Pamela had been impressed that Joanna had gone into Mrs. Streng's apartment. Maybe from the outside everyone looked braver than they really were. Maybe on the inside everyone was sometimes afraid, but they learned—like Mom—to do what they had to anyway. And if that was true, maybe Joanna was braver than she thought.

Grandma called just as they finished cleaning up the kitchen. While Mom talked to her, Joanna sprawled on the couch and watched the tail end of the news on TV. There was a report about how countries were taking sides in the missile crisis. France, Germany, Britain, and a bunch more supported the United States. But a lot of others were behind the Soviet Union—China of course, but other countries, too—even Canada!

"Protests are going on all around the world," said the reporter, "and often the protests turn into riots . . ." Joanna cringed watching film footage of a riot outside an American embassy. People were swinging fists and sticks at one another. But the next story was the one that really put her new maybe-bravery to the test.

"The destroyers *Kennedy* and *Pierce*"—Sam's ship!—"teamed up today to halt and search the *Marucla*, a Russian-chartered freighter.

"A boarding party was aboard the *Marucla* for more than two hours," the newscaster continued, "but there were no incidents and no Russian weapons were found. This may not be the case tomorrow, however, when the Russian freighter *Poltava* is due to arrive in Cuban waters. Military sources say the nearly ten-thousand-ton freighter could very well be carrying nuclear missiles and is almost certainly armed . . ."

Ten thousand tons! It must be *huge*. How big was the *Pierce*? What if this *Poltava* ship was like the Superman of ships—and US guns couldn't even make a dent in it? What would happen to the *Pierce* and Sam then? Joanna's whole body shook. She remembered her nightmare. She saw the side of the ship splitting open and the men disappearing under the dark waves.

No! She wouldn't imagine anything so terrible happening to Sam. That had been a dream. In real life Sam would be fine. He had to be.

She opened her mouth to call to Mom that the *Pierce* was part of the quarantine, but she closed it before one word was out. Mom was already worried about Sam. Why add to her fears?

Joanna looked at Sam's picture. She hadn't liked it because Sam didn't look like *her* Sam. But the navy's Sam looked stern and strong, like someone who could survive a battle. Like someone who could protect his country. She inhaled sharply. Was that what he'd meant when he said he joined the navy for her and Mom, too? Was it a way to help keep them safe? In her heart, she felt she truly understood Sam's decision at last. "Just please, please don't get hurt," she whispered to the photo.

"Dix, let's go for a walk," she called. She needed to keep busy or she'd go crazy imagining the worst.

Dixie came running across the faded linoleum so fast, her paws slid out from under her and she landed on her belly, but she quickly scrambled to her feet and ran the rest of the way to the door. Joanna grinned as she snapped on the leash. "Silly dog."

Outside, with Dixie at her side, Joanna walked slowly, looking up at the stars and crescent moon, wondering again if maybe Sam was looking at them, too. On her way back to the house, she saw the curtains in Mrs. Streng's front window flutter. She waved and the curtains parted. Mrs. Streng waved back.

So many things had happened that day. Joanna's head was a jumble of images and thoughts. After she hung up her jacket, instead of picking up her library book or turning the television on, she slipped off her shoes and curled up on the couch. Using her notebook as a desk, she began to write:

Friday, October 26

Dear Sam,

This has been an amazing day for you and for me. For you because the Pierce stopped the Marucla. I heard it on the news. That had to be so scary! I'm glad there wasn't any trouble. It was a

scary day for me, too, because there was another air-raid drill at school, but I thought it was real. I ran home so I could be with Dixie. But when I got home I had to help our first-floor neighbor who I thought was a Russian spy or a kidnapper or something else scary and bad but who turned out to just be a nice old lady. Anyway, when I got back to school I could have been in a lot of trouble, but my teacher was nice and didn't report me. He just made me promise to tell Mom. So I did, and we talked and I really do feel better now.

A shadow fell over the paper and Joanna looked up. She'd been so intent on her letter that she hadn't heard her mother come into the room. Mom sat down beside Joanna on the couch and made a big deal of clearing her throat, like people do when they have some important announcement to make. Joanna looked at her expectantly. What was up?

Mom didn't keep her in suspense. "If you still want to, you have my permission to go to Sherry's party."

Want to! "Yes, oh yes, I want to!" Joanna threw her arms around Mom's neck. She couldn't believe it. Just when she'd given up all hope. "What made you change your mind?"

Mom stroked Joanna's hair. "I thought about all the growing up you've had to do since Sam left. And, well, I still don't approve of boy-girl parties at night at your age, but just this once, I think you deserve a special treat."

"Thank you, Mom! Thank you!"—smack—"Thank you!"—smack—"Thank you!" Joanna kissed Mom's cheek loudly between each thank-you.

"My goodness, I've never seen you so excited about a party before," Mom said, shaking her head.

"Oh, it's not about the party. Not really. It's about a horse," Joanna replied. She couldn't sit still. She was too excited. She sprang up from the couch to do a happy twirl.

“A horse,” Mom repeated in confusion as she got up from the couch. “Of course.” She left the room still shaking her head.

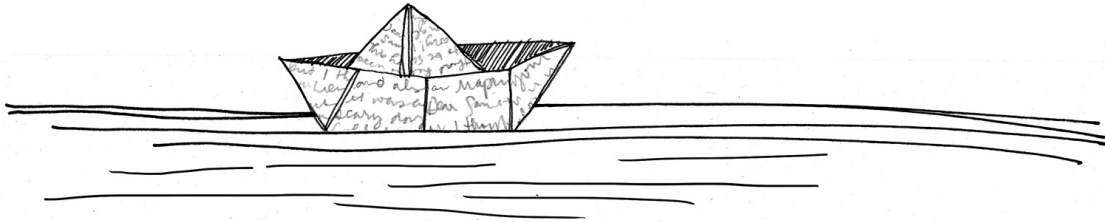
When she was out of earshot, Joanna added softly, “And a boy.”

She went to her room to look through her closet and decide what to wear to the party, but first she turned on her radio. She was pleased to hear music instead of news. And she was amazed by the song that was playing. Why, it was as if even the universe had heard that she was going to the party after all. The song on the radio was “Sherry”! How amazing was that?

A little while later, her favorite skirt and blouse hanging front and center in her closet, Joanna blew a kiss to Sam’s photo, turned off her lamp, and snuggled into her pillow.

Such a strange day! But it had ended happily, and that was the main thing. Now, if only the Russians would take their missiles and go home.

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Shocking News

JOANNA SNAPPED ON HER RADIO FIRST THING THE NEXT morning to see if there was more information about the giant Russian ship. There was talk of more riots around the world and Joanna couldn't help shivering. It was as if the whole world was going crazy. Then the newscaster's voice lost some of its gloom-and-doom tone.

"Closer to home, the suburb of Des Plaines had an exciting evening last night when many of its citizens believed an air-raid alert was the real thing. Panic broke out and the police department was besieged with hundreds of calls from terrified citizens who thought our country was under attack. Advance phone calls had been made, advising people of the alert and asking them to notify neighbors and friends, but apparently the warning was not communicated as effectively as civil defense workers had anticipated."

Ha! No kidding. Joanna grinned but she felt sorry for those people. She knew how terrified they must have been. But she felt a lot better knowing that an entire town had made the same mistake she had made. And they were grown-ups!

". . . The weather today will be mostly cloudy with—"

She spun the dial and found another station that was reporting the news, but it didn't say anything about the *Pierce* or the *Poltava*, either. Well, maybe no news was a good thing. That's what she was going to think, anyway. Unless and until she heard otherwise.

She turned the dial again and caught the last half of "Do You Love Me?" It was the number one song of the week and one of her favorites. She danced and sang as she plucked a sweater and pants from her drawer.

Just like every other Saturday morning, right after breakfast, Mom and Joanna loaded the dirty laundry into a big white drawstring bag, set it in Sam's old red wagon, and pulled it up Division Street to the Laundromat. Joanna stayed with the laundry while Mom went to the A&P two doors

down and shopped for groceries. Joanna didn't like getting up early on Saturdays, but at least she was guaranteed some good reading time.

Today she had the Laundromat all to herself and she had an especially good book. *Taffy's Foal* was about a girl who lived in the country and had a horse she loved, but then had to move to the city and leave her horse behind. With the soft rumbling of the machines in the background, Joanna turned pages faster and faster.

She had just reached a really exciting part when the washers stopped. She hated to put down her book, but she had to shift the wet clothes into the dryers and drop dimes into the coin slots. She did it all as fast as she could, eager to return to the story, but on the way back to her chair, she noticed a *Chicago Daily Tribune* on top of a dryer. When she saw the headline, she forgot all about her book.

NIKITA DELAYS ARMS SHIPS

"Oh my gosh!" Joanna exclaimed. But right below that, in just a little bit smaller letters, it said:

Reds Speed Cuban Missile Buildup

"*What?*" The two headlines seemed to be saying opposite things. Joanna's stomach dipped and churned as she read both articles.

The first one said Nikita Khrushchev promised that Russia would hold its ships back for a while in the hope that a conflict could be avoided. But the second article said work on the missile bases was going ahead faster than ever, and that the US was thinking about changing the quarantine—which was just for keeping out ships carrying weapons—into a full-blown blockade that kept out *all* ships, no matter what they were carrying—even food and medicines.

That sounded pretty drastic. But so did the fact that the Russians were building those missile bases so darn fast!

Joanna swallowed hard. She put down the newspaper. There were crumpled spots on both edges of it now from where her hands had clenched

as she read.

She sat back down and tried to read her book, but her thoughts kept drifting off to Cuba and Sam. She was glad when she heard the buzz of the dryer and a few moments later Mom came through the door with two grocery bags in her arms. Together they folded the warm clothes and linens and stacked them neatly back inside the clean laundry bag. Then they set it and the two grocery bags in the wagon and headed home.

A little while later, laundry and groceries put away, Joanna decided to stop in to see Mrs. Strengé while Mom had a second cup of coffee and wrote a letter to Sam.

"I can only stay a few minutes," she told a delighted Mrs. Strengé. "When Mom finishes her letter to Sam, it will be time to clean the apartment." She wrinkled her nose. "I just wanted to see how Harvey is doing today."

"See for yourself," the old woman said with a laugh.

Joanna looked into the living room, where Harvey was batting an empty thread spool around the floor like a hockey player without a stick. He'd swipe with one paw and then the other and sometimes jump straight up in the air.

Joanna grinned. "He looks okay to me."

"Thanks to you," Mrs. Strengé said.

Joanna blushed. "I noticed yesterday that you have a whole bunch of S&H Green Stamps that need to be pasted into books. If you want, I can help you with them sometime."

"Oh, that would be wonderful, dear." Mrs. Strengé beamed. "With my stiff old hands it's sometimes hard for me to tear the stamps apart."

"Save them for me," Joanna told her, sitting down on the sofa.

Mrs. Strengé eased herself into her chair. "How did it go when you got back to school yesterday?"

"A lot better than I expected," Joanna admitted. "You were right. My teacher was way more understanding than I thought he'd be."

"I'm glad," Mrs. Strengé said with a pleased nod. Then she added thoughtfully, "It's been my experience that most people are kind when we give them a chance."

Joanna nodded hard in agreement. She hadn't given Mrs. Strengé a chance and look at all the worries that had caused her.

When she went back downstairs half an hour later, Mom was just slipping Sam's letter into an envelope. She grinned and said, "You're right on time." Joanna wrinkled her nose but went to work.

While Mom scrubbed floors and changed bed linens, Joanna dusted and vacuumed. Saturday morning was the one time Joanna was glad their apartment was tiny. It was always clean by noon, and she had the rest of the day to do something fun with Pamela.

When the weather wasn't too cold or wet, they usually walked to the library, and they stopped at Woolworths on their way home to giggle over the true confession magazines. If they didn't go to the library, they stayed home and played Monopoly or Clue or rummy. Today, though, Joanna hoped Marie would be off somewhere so she and Pamela could read more of The Book. So as soon as she had gobbled down a bologna sandwich, she headed upstairs.

Most of the time Pamela was ready and waiting, and she pounced on the door as soon as Joanna knocked. But that day it was a while before the door was answered, and it was an unsmiling Marie who opened it. Joanna tried to hide her disappointment. Chances for reading The Book didn't look good.

She looked past Marie, expecting to see Pamela hurrying toward them, but all she saw was Mr. Waterman. He was in his chair, staring at the television—which was odd, because it wasn't even turned on. Marie shifted her position, blocking Joanna's view into the apartment.

"Is Pamela home?" Joanna asked.

Marie gave a little sniff. "She's not feeling well."

Golly! Pamela hardly ever got sick. She must've caught whatever Mr. Waterman had. "Oh. That's too bad. Tell her I hope she feels bet—" But the rest of Joanna's message was cut off because Marie closed the door.

Gosh! How rude. But maybe she wasn't feeling well, either . . .

Back downstairs, Joanna told Mom that Pamela and Mr. Waterman were sick.

"Oh, what a shame!" Mom said. "I hope it's nothing serious."

"Just the flu, I think." Joanna realized that Marie hadn't really said. All Joanna knew for sure was that she had a long afternoon ahead.

Mom was spreading her books on the table. Joanna decided she might as well do her homework, too. She had the party to look forward to later, but doing homework was a boring way to spend a Saturday afternoon, and she

couldn't help the disgusted sigh that whooshed out of her when she sat down.

Mom gave her a sympathetic smile. Then the smile stretched into a grin. She slapped her book shut and stood up. "Forget your homework, young lady. We're going to do something fun."

Joanna looked at her. "What kind of fun?"

Mom winked. "The chocolate chip cookie kind."

Joanna jumped to her feet with a little whoop. "Really?" She and Mom hadn't baked cookies in ages.

"I bought enough ingredients to bake a double batch—one for Sam and one for us. I was going to wait until tomorrow, but I think we need some chocolate sooner rather than later. What do you think?"

"I think we should hurry up and get started!" Baking cookies for Sam was a terrific idea. Joanna couldn't imagine anything bad happening to Sam when they were baking his favorite cookies. She could only think of how happy he was going to be when they arrived.

Mom stacked her books into a pile and swept them onto a chair, out of the way. Joanna did the same with hers. Then Mom headed for the refrigerator. "You get the flour, sugar, and brown sugar," she said. "I'll get the margarine and eggs."

Joanna flew to the pantry. Soon the table was covered with ingredients and she was covered with flour. She'd never understand how Mom could bake and stay so clean. Joanna always managed to spill or splash things all over herself. But she'd be changing her clothes for the party anyway, so today it didn't matter. And Dixie happily cleaned up most of what landed on the floor—everything except the flour, although she sniffed it and a little stuck to her nose. It looked pretty funny until Joanna wiped it off.

"If only we could make good things like this in Slop Class. Then it might actually be fun," she told Mom as she licked a dab of cookie dough from her finger.

"*Slop Class?*" Mom echoed.

Joanna grinned. "It's supposed to be cooking, but mostly we make things like custards and pudding and stuff that nobody wants to eat." She shrugged. "Slop."

Mom laughed. "Come to think of it, I had a class like that when I was in school, and it was pretty awful, too."

The cookies turned out great. But when they'd cooled and Mom went to the shelf for containers to pack them in, she looked confused. "I could have sworn I had some empty coffee cans . . ."

Uh-oh! Joanna rushed to her closet and returned with two of the cans she'd filled with water. Cheeks burning, she carried them to the sink. "I'll just empty them out," she mumbled.

"Wait." Mom stopped her. "Saving water is a good idea. I should have thought of it myself. What else have you put aside?"

Joanna led the way to her closet and opened the door. Mom looked inside at the jars of water and the cans and boxes of food, the flashlight, the quilt and pillow, and Dixie's food. All the while, Joanna stood very still, hands clasped so tightly together that her fingers ached. If her mother laughed, she was sure she would curl up and die of embarrassment on the spot.

Mom turned around wearing such a wide grin that Joanna's lip started to quiver. But she said, "What a great idea! You even remembered a can opener and a spoon. This is exactly the kind of thing I can imagine Sam doing."

Joanna felt a rush of pride she hadn't felt in a long time.

"Can I offer just one suggestion to make your shelter even better?" Mom asked.

"Sure." Joanna looked at her expectantly.

"Your closet is only a few feet from your bedroom window. If we moved the shelter to the pantry, it would be a lot more protected."

Joanna quickly nodded. Now that she didn't have to keep the shelter a secret from Mom, she could see that the pantry really would be the safer place to hide if they had to. Not only was it farther from a window, it was bigger than her closet. "And this way we can just leave the food on the shelves," she said.

"Let's move these things right now." Mom rolled up the quilt and stuffed it under her arm. Then she picked up the pillow. She looked at the ribbon-wrapped packet of Sam's letters for a long moment. Then she laid them carefully in Joanna's hands.

Joanna took the letters and the flashlight and the bag of Dixie's kibble. Between the two of them, after just a couple of trips, she and Mom had emptied the closet and organized all the cans of food back in the pantry with

the can opener beside them. Mom put the rolled-up quilt against the back wall and set two pillows on top.

Joanna got bowls and another spoon from the kitchen. Then she brought the coffee cans back from the sink after refilling them with fresh water. Mom added blank paper and pencils, a deck of cards, and some of her books and Joanna's. Last of all she brought Sam's navy photograph.

"This is a terrific shelter," Joanna said when she and Mom both stepped back to view the results of their work.

"It is," Mom agreed. She laughed suddenly and gave Joanna's shoulders a quick squeeze. "Sam would be impressed."

Joanna grinned. Mom was right.

Instead of packing Sam's cookies in coffee cans so they wouldn't get crushed, they packed them inside of the sturdy cardboard box Joanna's winter boots had come in. They crumpled wax paper all around the sides and between the layers to keep the cookies from breaking. Then Mom and Joanna each wrote a note that they tucked inside.

Joanna's note said, "*Dear Seaman Sam—Don't eat all these cookies at once just because Mom isn't there to stop you. You'll be Seasick Sam for sure if you do! Love, Joanna.*"

Once the box was taped up and ready for Mom to take to the post office, settling down to do homework didn't seem so awful anymore. But when Joanna opened her notebook, she found the letter she'd started to Sam the night before. If she'd been thinking, she could have slipped it in with the cookies, but getting a letter *plus* a package from home would probably be twice as nice for Sam. Besides, she had more to write about now.

She'd left off telling Sam about the air-raid drill that turned out to be a false alarm. She picked up her pen and wrote about how the very same thing had happened in the suburb of Des Plaines. Then she told him about the confusing stories in the newspaper.

It's hard to know what to think when two stories on the same page say such different things. Oh my gosh, I nearly forgot the best news of all. Mom told me I can go to Sherry's party tonight! I can still hardly believe it. Now if I can just get a chance to

talk to Theo about his horse, maybe the two of us can go riding sometime.

If only she could keep Sherry away from him, Joanna thought but did not write.

Guess what? Mom and I set up a shelter in the pantry. I had started a secret one in my closet, but this one is a lot better. I'm so glad Mom doesn't think I was dumb for trying to be prepared. I was afraid she would. Now we just have to hope we don't need to use it.

***Love,
Jo***

Joanna folded the letter neatly and slipped it into the pocket of her notebook. She'd get an envelope from Mom later. She didn't want to interrupt her while she was doing homework. In fact, Joanna decided to join her. She opened her math book and whizzed through the problems that had been assigned. She reviewed the spelling words for Monday's test, and she wrote out answers to five geography questions. Every once in a while, she turned on her radio, but she wasn't able to learn anything more about what was going on at the quarantine. No news is good news, she told herself again.

There was never anything interesting on TV on Saturday afternoons, so once her homework was finished, Joanna sat in her favorite chair and read the final pages of *Taffy's Foal*. There was one really sad part that nearly made her cry. Luckily, though, the story didn't end there, and things got better, so she was smiling by the time she closed the book. She had only one more library book left—*The Black Stallion*—and there was a long week ahead. Maybe she should save it? But in the end, she couldn't resist temptation. She promised herself she would read slowly, though.

She read until Mom called her to supper. They were eating early so Joanna would have time to get ready for the party.

The doorbell rang just as they were clearing the table.

Joanna headed for the door while Dixie raced ahead of her, barking as ferociously as a dog ten times her size.

Joanna peered through the curtain on the front door. "It's Pamela! Hush, Dixie." She flipped the lock and swung open the door. "Hi!"

Pamela stepped inside and immediately bent down to pet Dixie, who was bouncing happily around her feet.

Mom joined them. "You're just in time to taste-test the cookies we made this afternoon, Pamela. We have to make sure they're good enough to send to Sam, and I know you're an expert when it comes to chocolate chip cookies."

Pamela straightened up and smiled. "Sure, Mrs. Maxwell. Bring 'em on."

They did, and Pamela pronounced them the best ever. But she only ate two. Usually she ate at least four or five. Joanna guessed that her stomach might still be a little unsteady.

Mom waved them both away after they carried their glasses to the sink. "Go. Have fun."

So they went to Joanna's room, and Joanna was just about to tell Pamela the good news that she was going to the party after all, when Pamela grabbed her arm. "The reason I came down is to tell you something. Something I don't want anyone else to know. Just you. You can tell your mom 'cause she'll find out anyway. But nobody else, okay?" Pamela's eyes were suddenly shiny and her lip was quivering.

"Sure, Pamela," Joanna said. "You know you can count on me to keep a secret."

Pamela nodded. "I know. But this is a big one."

"I won't tell a soul," Joanna promised. "Cross my heart."

"It's something awful," Pamela warned.

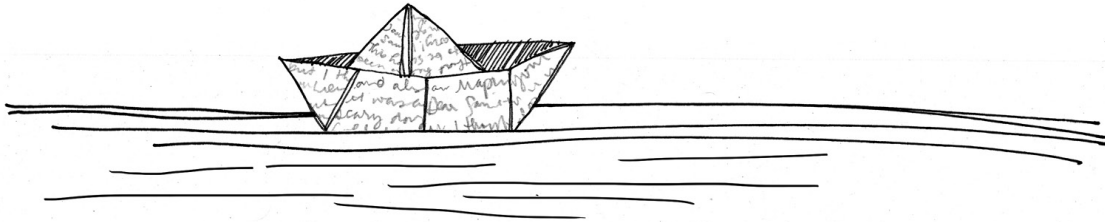
"Awful," Joanna repeated. She was starting to get scared. "Did something happen to your father?" She remembered how he'd been staring at the blank television. Maybe he really had lost his job or . . .

Pamela shook her head. "It happened to all of us." She licked her lips. "Mom is gone."

"Gone? Gone where?"

"To Paris," Pamela said. "With Uncle Zach."

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Poor Pamela!

PAMELA TRUDGED OVER TO THE BED AND SANK DOWN ON it heavily. “She never even said good-bye.”

“When’s she coming back?”

“That’s just it,” Pamela said sharply. “She’s not coming back. She’s staying.”

Joanna heard herself gasp but she couldn’t help it. “You mean *forever*?”

Pamela nodded miserably.

“But *why*?”

“She left a letter for Daddy. He only read Marie and me part of it. It was something about needing to paint—only being half alive here—which is crazy since she wasn’t painting anyway.” Pamela looked confused now, as well as miserable. “And she left a note for Marie and me. She said she was sorry for leaving so suddenly, but how we’re so grown up now, we don’t really need her like we used to. And we can come and spend summers in France with her and have wonderful times. And how she’s going to write and call, so we’ll hardly miss her at all.”

Pamela raised her head, a half-hurt, half-bewildered expression on her face. “How can she *say* that?”

Joanna shook her head. She was speechless.

“Daddy blames it on the trouble with Cuba,” Pamela sniffled. “He says she’s frightened out of her mind and not thinking clearly.”

“He’s probably right,” Joanna said quickly, hurrying to sit down beside her best friend. “Probably as soon as things settle down, she’ll come home again.”

Pamela wiped her nose on the back of her hand and shook her head. “That’s what I said to Daddy last night—that maybe in a week or two Mom will come back—and it was like he went crazy, Joanna. He picked up the vase on the dining room table—the one with the flowers in it—and he *threw*

it clear across the room! It hit the radiator and smashed into a million pieces. He shouted, ‘She’s never coming back. Not now!’ Then he went to his bedroom and slammed the door.”

Pamela swallowed so hard, Joanna heard it and winced.

“I guess he figures now that she’s finally in Paris, Mom will never want to leave,” Pamela finished.

Joanna nodded automatically, but a thought tiptoed its way into her mind. What if Uncle Zach hadn’t been teasing—what if he really was still in love with Mrs. Waterman? And what if she’d started to fall in love with him again, too? What if she didn’t just leave to be an artist in Paris—which was plenty awful enough—what if she left to be with Uncle Zach?

Joanna told herself she was letting her imagination run away with her, but she didn’t believe it. This time she thought she was right. She remembered that afternoon in the sunroom when Mrs. Waterman showed her the painting and how she’d looked at Uncle Zach and blushed. And how he’d looked at her. Then she remembered the quarrel the Watermans had that same night. Still . . . How could Mrs. Waterman have just *left*?

Pamela let out a long, shuddery breath. “This afternoon Daddy packed up all Mom’s paints and canvases and clothes. He’s going to ship it all to Paris. And he’s giving the sunroom to Marie just like she wanted.”

“I’m sorry, Pamela. Really, really sorry.” Joanna put her arm around Pamela’s shoulders and squeezed. She didn’t know what else to say. She only knew she would never tell Pamela her suspicions about Mrs. Waterman and Uncle Zach. That was one secret she would keep forever.

“I hate her!” Pamela said in a strange, hard voice. “And I never want to see her again. Not even in France.”

Joanna was silent. She remembered how hurt and angry she’d been at Sam when he left, and the horrible things she’d said to him.

“It’s awful upstairs,” Pamela whispered. “Marie is nice to Daddy and hateful to me. And it’s like Daddy isn’t really there—like he’s gone, too.” Her shoulders slumped. A tear had dried on her cheek. “I hate to go back.”

The solution seemed obvious to Joanna. “Don’t,” she suggested. “Spend the night with me. We’ll have a pajama party.” She bounced up from the bed.

“Really?” Pamela brightened at once.

Joanna poked her head through the doorway. “Mom? Pamela can spend the night, can’t she?”

Mom’s “Of course” sounded a little surprised, and no wonder, since she thought Joanna was going to Sherry’s party, but Joanna turned back to Pamela with a “ta-da” flourish of her hands. “See? It’s party time. Go ask your dad and get your pajamas and toothbrush. We’ll watch the late movie and we’ll make popcorn and toast marshmallows, and eat chocolate chip cookies ’til we explode.”

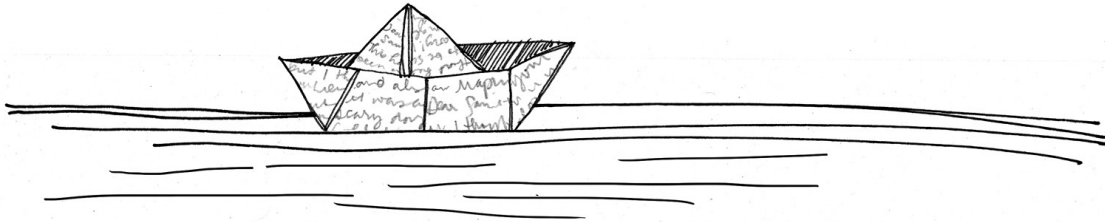
Pamela sprang up from the bed and threw her arms around Joanna. “What a great idea. You’re the best!” She hurried off.

Joanna watched her go. She thought of Theo and his horse and sighed. Then she told Mom about Mrs. Waterman.

“That poor child,” Mom murmured. “That poor *family*.” She got up from the sofa and kissed Joanna’s cheek. “It’s a nice thing you’re doing to stay home from your party to be with Pamela. I’m proud of you.” She wrapped her arms around Joanna in a hug.

Joanna thought of Pamela and how long she might have to wait to hug her mother again.

She hugged Mom back extra tight.



The Scariest Day

MOM SURPRISED JOANNA THE NEXT MORNING. SHE

suggested they go to church even though it wasn't Easter or Christmas. Joanna didn't argue. The news that day was the scariest yet. A US plane had been shot down over Cuba.

"Major Rudolf Anderson Jr., age thirty-five, of the United States Air Force, is missing in action after his unarmed reconnaissance aircraft was fired on yesterday by Cuban forces."

Joanna heard that news report over and over in her head as they walked the two blocks to church. Pamela was with them. She didn't seem in any hurry to go home, and Joanna didn't blame her. She didn't know if she'd ever want to go to Pamela's apartment again. It used to be such a special and happy place. But Mrs. Waterman had ruined it just like Mr. Waterman ruined that vase, smashing it to pieces. All the good memories Joanna had of Mrs. Waterman were like smashed pieces, too, with sharp, hurting edges.

Joanna felt almost guilty about going to church. It seemed to her that if you were only Christmas and Easter churchgoers, it was wrong to suddenly go on a regular Sunday just because you were scared. But Mom said she didn't think God cared *why* you came to church, as long as you came.

"It's really crowded!" Pamela murmured as they walked through the doorway. And she was right. Even last Easter there hadn't been so many people.

The three of them squeezed into a pew near the back. But more people kept coming. First, they lined up around the side walls, and then in the back, until pretty soon the rows of men and women standing were two and three people deep. The little white church was filled to overflowing.

Pastor Mike's sermons tended to go on and on, and Joanna usually didn't pay any closer attention to them than she did to Kennedy's speeches. But that day he started out with a statement that really caught her attention:

“Vengeance is mine, says the Lord!” He talked about how they were all supposed to forgive one another and have faith that God would do any punishing that was necessary. “Love, not vengeance, is our command,” Pastor Mike said. “And if all of us obeyed it, what a very different world this would be!”

Joanna wished President Kennedy and Premier Khrushchev and Fidel Castro could hear Pastor Mike. Then the US would end the quarantine, Russia would take back its missiles, and Cuba wouldn’t shoot down any more pilots. Everyone could go back to doing what they’d been doing before the crisis began. President Kennedy could play with his children and sign laws and give boring speeches again.

He’d been right to stand up to Russia. Now Joanna was glad and proud that he was their president. But she was afraid the loss of that pilot—Major Anderson—might make Kennedy so angry, he’d think they had to fight back. She hoped somehow he would find a way to make things better instead of worse.

Back at home, they changed from their church clothes and Mom cooked fried chicken and mashed potatoes. After they ate, she pulled out her typewriter and started practicing. Pamela and Joanna sat on the living room floor and played rummy. Pamela had just picked up the pile of discards for the third time in a row and Joanna had rolled onto the floor groaning when the doorbell rang.

It was Marie, wearing a wobbly smile. When she saw Pamela, she reached out her hand and said, “I’m sorry, Pim-Pam. Can you forgive me?”

Pamela threw herself into Marie’s arms and the two of them sniffled and hugged and finally laughed. “I need to go home now,” Pamela told Joanna.

Joanna nodded. “See you tomorrow.”

She closed the door and went back to the living room to gather up the cards scattered on the carpet, but her thoughts were whirling. So many things had changed in such a short space of time. Mrs. Waterman ran off with Uncle Zach. Mr. Waterman was smashing things. Marie was suddenly being a loving big sister. And that didn’t even count the changes that had happened to Joanna herself—forgiving Sam, confiding in Mom, and mustering up the courage to get to know Mrs. Streng. So many different changes, yet all of them were results of the same event—the missile crisis.

It was sort of like that story in Greek mythology that Mr. Egan had told them, where all the troubles of the world had been tucked away in a box until a girl—Pandora—opened the box and they came flying out.

Not that there hadn't been troubles in the world before the missile crisis, but somehow they hadn't touched Joanna. Abruptly, she smacked the deck of cards onto the coffee table. She didn't take the time to put them in their box. That could wait. She had to do something that couldn't.

She went to her room, opened her notebook, and took out her letter to Sam. She'd thought it was finished. But it wasn't. Not yet.

She smoothed the folded sheet of notebook paper and read what she had written. Shame swelled inside her. Almost every bit of the letter was about her and what she wanted. Even running away from school during the air-raid drill was because she wanted to be with Dixie at home. Maybe Frannie had thought she was brave to do it, but Joanna knew in her heart it had been cowardly, and she squirmed to read about it now.

She pushed down the button on the top of her pen and began to write, slowly at first and then faster.

PS I have some other news that Pamela told me I couldn't tell anyone, but I'm sure she didn't mean you. Her mother moved to Paris without even saying good-bye! She just left notes behind. She's not coming back and Pamela is awfully sad. I always thought Pamela was so lucky, but I guess she's not really. And I always thought Marie was so mean, but she's not—not completely, anyway. And I'm not as brave as some people think, but maybe not as big a scaredy-cat as I've been thinking, either.

It's as if the missile crisis sort of shook people up—like bottles of soda—and all these surprising things that were inside all along, but you didn't see, came bursting out. I'm sure Mrs. Waterman would never have left if it hadn't been for the trouble with

Cuba. And I might never have talked to Mom about how scared I really was, or realized what a nice lady Mrs. Streng is. And it would have been a while yet before I broke down and wrote to you.

The telephone rang and Joanna jumped. Her pen left a tiny squiggle behind on the paper. It was probably Grandma calling, she thought as she carefully turned the squiggle into a heart. But a second later Mom appeared in the doorway. "Joanna, phone for you."

For her? Pamela had only been home for half an hour. Did she want to come back already?

Mom had a strange look on her face that made Joanna think that maybe it wasn't Pamela on the phone after all. But who else would be calling her? She took the receiver. "Hello?"

"Hi," came a familiar voice.

"Theo?" Joanna couldn't believe it.

"Have you heard the news?"

"What news? Did something happen?" Her breath caught in her throat. Sam!

"It's over. The Russians are taking down their missile launchers."

"Ohmygosh!" Joanna's knees started to fold. She grabbed onto the kitchen table just in time. "Mom—it's over! The Russians are backing down!"

Dixie, startled out of a nap under the table, jumped up and barked.

Mom leaped up from the table with the most joyful, relieved look Joanna had ever seen. "Thank goodness!" she said. Then she covered her eyes with her hands and Joanna knew she was crying. Suddenly Joanna remembered Theo on the other end of the phone.

"I'm sorry, Theo—I had to tell my mother. She's so happy! It was really nice of you to call and tell us."

"I wanted to make sure you knew right away," he said.

"I can still hardly believe it!" Joanna was so happy she twirled around, wrapping herself in the phone cord.

"Is that why you didn't come to the party last night?" Theo asked. "Because you were worried about your brother?"

“No. I was all set to go,” Joanna told him, twirling the other way to unwind herself. “But something awful happened to a friend of mine, and I thought I should stay with her.”

“Too bad. About your friend, I mean.”

“Was the party fun?”

Theo laughed. “The best part was the homemade pizza.”

“Joanna?” Mom whispered loudly.

Joanna turned to look at her.

“Honey, we should call Grandma and let her know . . .”

“Oh, right.” Joanna nodded. “Theo? My mom wants to call my grandmother to tell her the good news. So I have to get off the phone . . .”

“Oh, okay. But can I just ask you one thing first?”

“Sure—what?”

“Do you like horses?”

Laughter bubbled up inside of Joanna. She could barely hold it back. “I’m *crazy* about horses,” she managed to say.

They hung up a few moments later. Mom gave Joanna an enormous hug. Then she dialed Grandma’s number.

Joanna got her radio and snapped it on. So much was happening at once, she felt almost dizzy. In just a few minutes everything had changed.

“. . . appears to be over. President Kennedy has received word from the Soviets that they will dismantle the launchers they brought to Cuba and return them to the Soviet Union . . . I repeat, the missile crisis in Cuba appears to be over. The Russians have agreed to . . .”

The newscaster babbled on with more details, but Joanna had heard enough news that week to last her a good long time.

She nudged the dial back to its old setting. Chris Montez was singing “Let’s Dance.” Ahhhh . . . perfect! She picked up Sam’s graduation photo and kissed it before bouncing back onto her bed, where she picked up her pen one more time.

“*The news just came that the crisis is over!*” she added to her now very long letter. “*I’m so happy. You’re safe! We’re all safe!*” She added a trail of x’s across the page.

Then she couldn’t be still another second. She sprang up from her bed, turned up the volume on her radio, and began to dance.

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Author's Note

I was twelve when President Kennedy made his somber speech announcing the Cuban Missile Crisis. It was the beginning of the longest—and scariest—week of my childhood.

I vividly remember how eerily quiet the school yard was the next morning and how the kids who actually came to school knotted together in small groups, quoting reassuring words they'd heard from their parents but unable to sound as if they entirely believed them. Their expressions were suddenly older and fearful in a way that went far beyond worry about an upcoming test or report card.

The air-raid drills and “duck and cover” practices did nothing to relieve the tension that always clung to us that week. They made it worse, in fact—the blasts of the bells calling to the surface all the fear we were trying to bury for a while beneath math, and English, and social studies that didn't revolve around the possibility of the destruction of the world.

I was shocked to discover some years ago that many people weren't aware of this extraordinary week in our history, a week in which the United States came within a heartbeat of nuclear war. To me, this was incomprehensible. The Cuban Missile Crisis should never be forgotten because it is proof that even when war looks and feels inevitable, it can be avoided by negotiation—by using words instead of weapons.

And so I was moved to write this story about what was for me an unforgettable week.

Although *Cold War on Maplewood Street* is a work of fiction, the emotions and the headlines and news stories presented in it are absolutely true.

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GAYLE ROSENGREN grew up in Chicago. Like Joanna in *Cold War on Maplewood Street*, she enjoyed school, was a voracious reader, and loved dogs and horses. She attended Knox College, where she majored in creative writing and was the editor of the literary magazine. Gayle never outgrew her passion for children's books, and worked as a children's and young adult librarian at Fountaindale Public Library in Bolingbrook, Illinois, for several years, enthusiastically sharing her love of books.

Gayle eventually moved to Wisconsin, but by then she was the mother of three children. She worked in a reference library and as a copy editor, and she wrote short stories for children that appeared in *Cricket*, *Ladybug*, *Jack and Jill*, and *Children's Digest* magazines. Now Gayle writes full-time just outside of Madison, Wisconsin, where she lives with her husband, Don, and their slightly neurotic rescue dog, Fiona. She is living her dream, she says, writing books she hopes will make the same difference in children's lives as her favorite authors made in hers. *Cold War on Maplewood Street* is her second novel for young readers.

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