

As soon as the temperature drops, people start getting excited up in Nome, Alaska. They never go to bed at night without peeking out their windows first. They want to see what the weather is doing. If a light snow is falling, they know that by morning the roads will be dangerous. That's where the sled dogs come into play.

Sled dogs are fun, peppy, medium-sized dogs. Their colors are different, but they all have thick, downy coats of fur. The dogs' tails curl up when they are excited.

There's nothing a sled dog loves more than the cold, fierce winds of winter. Even though most owners build shelters for their sled dogs, the dogs prefer to sleep outside. They tuck their noses into their tails. They snuggle their bodies deep in the snow.

Sled dogs are playful, intelligent, and very vocal. They do not bark. Instead, they howl like wolves. It's not uncommon for a pack of sled dogs to have a group howl at sunset and sunrise.

A person who owns sled dogs can be sure that their sleep will be disturbed on the mornings after a deep snow has fallen. The dogs will be up on the roofs of their doghouses, welcoming the snow with their long yowls of anticipation. "Wake up, wake up, WAKE UP!" They seem to be howling. "We want to play in the snow!"

The two most important things in a sled dog's life are running and pulling. Quite simply, that is what they are born to do.

A sled dog will like nothing better than to trot in front of a person on skis or a sled filled with supplies. They've been known to race with their owners on bikes or rollerblades. Pulling is a good way for them to get exercise and stay in shape all summer long. It's also great for the dogs' owners.

Together the dog and person team can romp and play in many ways during the snowless months. Nothing beats the thrill, however, of winter's return and a dog sled run through the snow.

Charlie Clark had been a mail carrier for thirty years. He was used to delivering mail in all types of weather. He'd delivered letters on delightful days, and he'd delivered letters on dreadful days.

Charlie was proud of his work and happy with his job. Never, in all his years as a mail carrier, had Charlie ever had a problem with a mailbox. Other mail carriers complained about mailboxes on their routes, but not Charlie.

He didn't have any worries until one day when he noticed there was a new box on his route. The mailbox was nailed to a branch of a dead tree. It was battered, dented, and badly rusted. The flag at its side was crooked and bent.

Charlie felt bad about it. "People should treat their mailboxes with more respect," he muttered as he dug through his bag.

He had letters addressed to the box, so he pulled it open and set them inside. He was about to pull his hand out when the box bit him. It had a grip on his hand and wouldn't let go.

Charlie looked up and down the street for someone to help him, but there was no one in sight. He wrestled with the box for an hour, until the box spit out his hand.

The next day he had more letters addressed to that box. With the letters in his hand, he stopped in front of it. He waited for something to happen, but the box was quiet today.

Charlie quickly slipped the letters inside and almost got his hand out before the box latched onto him again.

This time Charlie and the mailbox had a fierce battle. Charlie hit and kicked the box, but still the box wouldn't let go. Finally, Charlie was out of breath, and he had to stop. He rested his head on the mailbox.

Suddenly, he had an idea. "There, there," he told the mailbox, patting it gently. "Why don't you let me go so I can deliver the rest of my mail?"

The mailbox began to purr and let him go nicely.

It was difficult moving to a new house. When I was eight, we left our old neighborhood and moved to a new one. We packed my dresser, my bunk bed, my computer, and my scooter. In every room of the house, boxes were piled high like building blocks.

The house felt still. I walked from room to room trying to remember what each one used to be like. As I walked through the living room, I noticed orange scribble marks on the wallpaper. My younger brother made those marks when we used to play art museum. Entering my bedroom, I noticed a large scratch on the hardwood floor. That was where my puppy, Clyde, and I used to play fetch with his toy kitten. Wandering down the hallway, I noticed pencil marks near the bathroom door. That was where my father used to measure me to see how tall I had grown each birthday. I already began to miss the wallpaper on the walls and the light fixtures on the ceilings.

"This has always been my house," I thought. "I don't want to leave." There had to be some way I could keep my house.

Looking out my bedroom window, I noticed the tree house Dad and I constructed years before. I hurried to the backyard, climbed up to my tree house, and decided not to go unless my tree house went too. I would keep the tree house to myself, and then I would be happy.

Just then my neighbor Logan arrived to say goodbye. "I wish you could stay, but I know you'll have even more fun at your new house," he said sadly.

Suddenly, I began to think of someone beside myself. I thought about my house, my yard, and my neighbors. I would miss everything, but I was going to get a new house, a new yard, and new neighbors. Logan, though, was just losing a friend. I realized then that Logan needed the tree house more than I did.

"Goodbye, Logan. Take care of the tree house," I said. "It's all yours."

The smile on Logan's face made me feel much better.

Robin refused to change his dirty socks. He thought his socks were lucky. He believed the longer he wore his socks, the luckier they became. Unfortunately, the longer Robin wore his socks, the smellier they became. When Robin wore his socks for two weeks straight, which he sometimes did if he had two tests in a row, a stench would trail two steps behind him wherever he went.

"Robin, this behavior has to stop," his mother told him. "You cannot wear the same pair of socks day in and day out. Your feet are going to rot. Now go and put that smelly pair of socks in the washing machine."

Robin did what his mom told him. He went downstairs to the washing machine and pulled off his socks. Already, he could feel himself becoming unlucky, but he didn't want his mom to be mad at him.

Hesitantly, he opened the lid of the washing machine, tossed in his soiled socks, and started the washing cycle. Instead of closing the lid and returning upstairs, he pulled himself up on the dryer to watch. Robin watched his socks go round and round, and as he watched, he became very dizzy. His head started to spin, he lost his balance, and he fell inside the washing machine.

When the machine finally stopped, Robin was able to stand up and climb out. He noticed he wasn't in his house anymore. He was in a place filled with piles of dirty laundry. Robin pinched his nose and read the sign stuck in the ground in front of him. The sign said "Dirty Laundry Land," and at the base of the sign was his pair of dirty socks.

"Well, what are you waiting for?" a voice asked. Robin turned and saw a dirty, little man speaking to him.

"Excuse me?" replied Robin.

"Put on the socks," he told Robin. "Put on the socks and you can stay here and have good luck forever."

Robin shook his head. He didn't want to stay. He climbed back into the washing machine, went home, and decided he would always wear clean socks.

The morning sunshine fell gently on the forest. A clumsy bear stumbled out of his den. The bear covered his eyes and yawned. The bear was a small cub, yet he was very hungry. He was on the hunt for honey, his favorite food. Just then, the bear heard something. A bumblebee buzzed by, and the clumsy little bear decided to follow it.

The bee flew further away from the bear. The bear thought he would find honey by following the bee. The bear hurried after the bee, tripping on roots and rocks. He stubbed his toe and stopped to grumble. Then the bear started to run after the bee again. The bumblebee was flying away quickly. The clumsy bear ran even faster because he wanted to find some honey. Finally the bear found the bumblebee's home.

The bumblebee's home was a beehive in the trunk of a tree. The beehive buzzed with bumblebees. If he could scare off the bumblebees, the bear knew he would find honey in that tree.

The bear walked over to the tree and tried to shake it. The tree was too big to shake. The bear started to climb the tree. As he climbed higher, the bees started to swarm around him, protecting their tree. They tried to sting the bear on the top of his paws, but his fur was too thick. They tried to sting him on the bottom of his feet, but his skin was too thick. Then one little bee found a spot right on his nose and stung him. The sting hurt the little bear.

The bear climbed back down from the tree and rubbed his nose. He kicked the tree and said, "Dumb tree." A pinecone fell from the tree and hit the bear on top of his head. The bear stamped his foot and frowned. "I didn't really want honey anyway," he said. He decided he wasn't hungry after all, so he went back to his den and fell asleep.

Alan was a very brave and adventurous boy. He enjoyed learning new things and exploring the land behind his house. One morning before he went exploring, he packed his backpack. He put many things inside. He packed a flashlight, a candle, matches, a compass, popcorn, a hard hat, and his lunch. Then he journeyed into the woods to his new secret spot.

The previous day he had discovered a cave, and today he wanted to explore it. Long, thick weeds hid the mouth of the cave. Alan pushed the weeds to the side and looked into the cave. It was too dark to see anything. He turned on his flashlight and looked inside again. The cave was only five feet tall. Alan just fit when he stepped inside.

Alan put his hard hat on. It would protect his head from the roof of the cave. He shined his flashlight around the cave. It was dry and cold inside. He walked around and explored the cave. He dropped popcorn behind him as he walked. He found old dishes in the cave. The cave walls displayed several paintings of animals.

Alan didn't know what he might find. He had dreamed about finding a lost treasure or some buried gold, but he knew he was more likely to find only mud and rocks. As he worked his way deeper into the cave, he discovered small waterfalls and sharp points of rock hanging from the ceiling.

When Alan reached the back of the cave, he stopped to eat his lunch. He was very hungry. But just as Alan finished eating, his flashlight went out. The batteries had died. It was very dark in the cave.

Alan struck a match so he could see. The flame lit up the cave. Then he lit the candle he brought. He carried it carefully. He followed the popcorn all the way back to the mouth of the cave. Alan had enjoyed the cave, but he thought he should pack more batteries for future explorations.

Tim carefully walked along the sidewalk and whispered to himself, "Step on a crack and break my mother's back." He repeated this saying over and over again.

Tim was trying so hard not to step on a sidewalk crack that he wasn't paying attention to anything else. He didn't notice Mrs. Jackson until he bumped into her.

"Ooof!" he exclaimed.

"Pardon me," said Mrs. Jackson. "Please watch where you are going, young man. Someone's going to get hurt."

"I'm just taking a walk," said Tim. "Why are you sitting there? The sidewalk isn't for sitting."

"I'm pulling weeds," explained Mrs. Jackson. "They grow between the sidewalk cracks, which makes it ugly." Tim nodded, although he kind of liked the green in the boring gray sidewalk. Mrs. Jackson had more to say. "I heard you talking to yourself," she said. "Do you know that I used to say the same thing when I was your age?"

"Did you ever step on a crack?" asked Tim. "My mom already sprained her ankle while playing ball with me. I don't want her to break her back, too!"

Mrs. Jackson looked at Tim with a smile. "We all step on the sidewalk cracks," she said. "It's fun to say the rhyme, but you have to remember it's only a superstition. There's no way your mother's back and your steps on the cracks are related. In fact, the only person I know who has ever broken his back is Mr. Lee from across the street. Remember when he fell off his roof last winter?"

Tim thought hard, and then he remembered the accident. There had been a lot of snow last winter. It piled up everywhere: by the street, at the playground, and on roofs. Mr. Lee was worried that the heavy snow would damage his house. So he climbed up on the roof to remove some of it. He slid off the snowy roof and landed on the only part of his yard without snow—the shoveled sidewalk!

"I wonder if Mr. Lee fell on a crack in the sidewalk," thought Tim.

Jason sat and waited for his grandfather to arrive. He always enjoyed his grandfather's visits. Jason could see the old car slowly make its way down the street toward his house. Grandpa's old car pulled into the driveway.

"Grandpa! Grandpa!" Jason shouted. "You're here!"

"Hello, Jason. How is my favorite grandson?" Grandpa chuckled.

"Well, I'm just dandy," said Jason. " Thank you for asking."

Grandpa and Jason walked into the house. Jason helped his grandfather carry his bags. They spent a wonderful day together playing in the backyard. Jason sat by his grandfather that night.

"Grandpa, what did you do when you were little?"

The grandfather looked at his grandson and answered, "Well, what do you do when you play?"

Jason answered, "We play games in my basement. We play catch in the backyard. We play football in the empty lot down the street. After school, my friends and I watch television shows. Sometimes my mom takes us to see a movie at the mall."

Grandpa smiled and said, "Jason, I used to do the same things when I was a boy."

"Really?"

"Really. In my old neighborhood, we would pick teams and play baseball in a sandlot. At school we played football. We didn't have facemasks. We wore leather helmets and soft pads in our shirts. When I was a young boy, we didn't have television. We only had radio. My friends and I would gather around the radio and listen to shows like 'The Lone Ranger' and 'The Shadow.' On Saturdays, we would ride our bikes to the movie house and watch cartoons or a double feature. The movies had singing cowboys and superheroes."

Jason asked his grandfather, "Can we see a movie together this Saturday?"

"Yes," said Grandpa. " I think we should."



The twins went to the museum. Their father took them to see the dinosaurs. "Garth, Jessie, this is the museum," Father said. "Do you know what you find in a museum?"

Garth walked through the door and saw a very large animal. "I see an elephant!"

Jessie walked a little further and saw many pretty rocks and jewels. "I can see lots of very pretty stones."

"Very good, Garth and Jessie. You can find many different things in a museum. Today I am going to show you dinosaurs," Father said.

"What's a dinosaur?" the twins asked.

"Dinosaurs are animals that lived many, many years ago. Let's see if we can find any."

The twins quickly walked to the dinosaur hall. They saw many different dinosaurs there. "I only see bones," Garth said.

"The dinosaurs are gone now. Their bones are the only parts left, and they have turned to stone," Father said.

The three of them walked through the museum looking at the bones of dinosaurs. Some dinosaurs were as little as a mouse. Some were as large as a car. Some were even bigger than a house! The twins spent the whole day learning about dinosaurs. The day was very fun.

The twins noticed that some dinosaurs looked like the animals on the earth today. They saw a large dinosaur that looked like a duck. Another looked like a hairy elephant. Some looked like alligators and crocodiles. One looked like a bird, and one reminded them of a shark.

"I'm glad I didn't live when the dinosaurs did. I'm sure I would have been lunch for a dinosaur," said Jessie.

"Not me. I would have run away from them and hid in a cave," said Garth.

Jessie roared like a dinosaur and ran after Garth. They looked through the rest of the dinosaur exhibit.

The twins will always remember their trip to see the dinosaurs.

One night as Alice was snuggling her pillows and about to fall asleep, she felt something wriggling between her feet. With a shriek, Alice sat up and turned on her lamp. She pulled the covers off her bed and found a toad looking up at her.

"Why, you ugly thing!" Alice yelled. "Get off my bed and out of my room at once." The toad merely looked up at her and blinked his golden eyes. He laid his leathery green head down, sighed, and went to sleep.

Alice slept on the floor that night. When she woke up in the morning, the toad was mysteriously gone. Alice made her bed, ate her breakfast, and went to school.

Alice had a perfect day. She got an "A" on her spelling test and won all the races on the playground at recess. She was feeling very smug as she opened her desk to pull out her literature book, but her smugness disappeared when she saw the toad sitting on her pencil box.

The toad's golden eyes glowed in the dim confines of her desk. He let out one low croak as he stared at her. He seemed to be waiting for her to do something, but Alice couldn't figure out what. The toad puckered his lips and made kissing sounds. Alice slammed her desk shut without pulling out her textbook.

The teacher looked at Alice strangely and then began the lesson. Alice didn't have a book, so she couldn't read along. She could hear the toad moving around in her desk as the teacher spoke. Alice rested her elbows on it and fixed a firm smile on her face. The teacher saw Alice was still without her book.

"Alice, you need to follow along in your book," the teacher said. "We are reading 'The Frog Prince' on page 45. Open your desk and get your book."

"But..." Alice said. "I can't."

The teacher told Alice to take out her book or go to the principal's office. Alice slowly opened her desk, expecting to see the toad. The toad was gone, but Alice was sure he'd be back again.

One day Philip and his family boarded a large ship at the wharf in London and set sail for the New World. Philip's family had been very poor in England. They were so poor all of their belongings fit in one trunk. However, their hearts carried many dreams for the New World.

Philip's father wanted to build an inn of his own where people could rest and get a good meal. His mother wanted her children to grow up in a land that was free.

Philip and his family stayed in a tiny, dark room on the bottom of the ship. Day after day and night after night, the sea tossed and turned the ship. Everyone in Philip's family got seasick. They all got well, except for Philip's youngest sister, Hannah. While everyone else was able to stroll on the decks of the great ship, Hannah lay on her cot and slept. Her face was pale, and she was getting weaker every day.

One night Philip's father was so worried about his youngest child, he spoke to the captain of the ship. The captain had very broad shoulders, white hair, and a white beard. His voice was gruff, but there was kindness in his eyes. Philip's family was shocked when their dad came back to the cabin with the captain at his side.

The captain knelt over Hannah's cot. He picked up her hand and held it in his own. "Well, what have we got here," he murmured. "What's your name, child?"

"Hannah," the little girl said weakly.

"Don't worry now, Hannah," the captain said. "I know exactly what you need." There was a twinkle in the captain's eyes as he reached into his pocket and pulled out a large orange.

"This orange is for you," he told Hannah. "I want you to eat the entire thing and stay in bed. In a few days you should be up on your feet and feeling better."

The captain was correct. In two days, Hannah was out of bed and annoying Philip as usual. Philip's family was relieved Hannah was herself again.

It was a fine winter's day, perfect for ice-skating. As soon as Alice finished her breakfast and brushed her teeth, she was out the door with her ice skates over her shoulder.

Alice's best friend, Mary Beth, lived just two blocks away in a big house with black shutters. Alice knocked on the back door and waited patiently for Mary Beth to gather her ice skates, coat, and mittens.

"Let's go," Alice said when Mary Beth was ready. "If we hurry, we'll be the first ones on the rink. We'll have all that fresh ice to skate on. We'll get to put the first lines of the day on the ice."

Alice and Mary Beth hurried down the street toward the ice rink. The sidewalks were covered with snow, so walking was hard. Alice and Mary Beth didn't mind. They stopped and made snow angels and snowballs as they trudged along.

"You were right, Alice," Mary Beth said as they rounded a corner and saw the empty rink. "Let's hurry and put on our skates." In no time at all, the girls had shed their boots, laced up their skates, and were standing on the edge of the rink.

The rink was a flawless silver mirror. As Mary Beth and Alice skated in circles around it, they could see their reflections moving on the ice beneath them.

"Oh, it's perfect," Alice said as she put one foot down and slid across the ice. "Watch me."

She made a funny face, laughed, lost her balance, and fell to the ice. Mary Beth skated around her. Finally she got close enough to help her friend to her feet. The girls held hands and skated across the ice together. Alice tugged Mary Beth one way, and Mary Beth tugged Alice the other way.

The two girls were having so much fun they didn't realize the rink was filling with other children. When they finally stopped their game, they saw their friends skating around them. They decided to play a game of ice tag. Alice and Mary Beth had a wonderful time at the rink.

One day Russ had a wonderful idea. He found a large bucket. He filled it with warm water and added a generous amount of dish soap. As quietly as he could, he snuck up to his mother's and father's bedroom and took a metal clothes hanger from their closet.

Then he carried the bucket of warm, sudsy water and the clothes hanger out to the backyard. Russ found a nice spot under an oak tree, far out of view of the house, and sat down.

First he bent the clothes hanger into a large circle. His perfect circle made him smile. Next, he dipped the circle into the bucket of water. Then he lifted it back out, held it at arm's length, and spun around in circles. Huge bubbles emerged from the circle and floated around the backyard.

Russ was having so much fun that he didn't see his little sister, Jenny, sneaking up on him. Russ didn't always like Jenny because she tattled on him whenever she got the chance.

When Jenny saw her brother making bubbles with their mother's clothes hanger, she thought she could get him in lots of trouble. If she told on him, he might get grounded for a week. But Jenny didn't want to tell. She wanted to make bubbles too.

"Let me try," she told him. "I want to make bubbles too, Russ." Russ ignored her and continued to make bubbles.

"Go away, brat," he said. "This bubble maker isn't for babies."

"I'm not a baby, and if you don't let me play, I'll tell on you," she replied. Russ sighed and handed the bubble maker to his sister. He watched her laugh as she made huge bubbles. Somehow, she managed to make even bigger bubbles than he had.

"How do you do that?" Russ asked. "Teach me, please."

Jenny showed Russ how to make big, slow-moving bubbles. They laughed as they watched them float across the yard. For that afternoon, they forgot that they didn't always like each other.

Jessica stared at the new black-rimmed glasses on her nightstand. As she lay in bed, many questions ran through her head. "Are these frames too ugly? Are kids going to laugh at me when I get on the bus? Should Mom have bought me the rectangular ones?"

Suddenly, Jessica saw 7:13 on the clock. She didn't feel like eating breakfast and quickly got ready. She packed her backpack and said goodbye. "I'm sure things will be just fine," her mom said as Jessica left the house. She ran down the driveway and saw her friends waiting for the school bus. Today, of all days, Jonathan was already there.

Jonathan was the meanest kid at the bus stop. He was always bossing people around and teasing them. "Hey, here comes Four Eyes," he shouted.

"Be quiet, Jonathan. I think Jessica looks awesome!" said Vanessa. Vanessa was in Jessica's math class. Jessica liked her because she wasn't afraid to stand up to anyone.

She thought kids might stare when she got on the bus. To Jessica's surprise, no one laughed at her. Later at school, she remembered the note she needed to leave in the office. For the first time, she noticed that the secretary, Mr. Green, wore glasses. Then the health aide, Leslie, came to make a copy. She had glasses on too.

Jessica couldn't help but notice that lots of teachers wore glasses. That made her feel a little less nervous. Her teacher, Mrs. Hadwick, was not wearing her contact lenses today. She was wearing new glasses!

"Good morning, Jessica," she said, "I love your new glasses. You remind me of that teenage star who sings 'Don't Be Scared.'" Jessica loved that song and had a poster of the famous singer in her locker. All day long she noticed the difference her glasses made. Letters were sharper, and she could see the board better. She thought it was easier to see exactly how many minutes were left until recess.

"This day wasn't so bad after all," Jessica thought.

The beaver didn't have many friends. It wasn't because he was always working and didn't have time to play. The sparrow and the rabbit worked all day too, and yet they had friends. It wasn't because of his smelly fur. The skunk and the muskrat smelled badly as well, and yet the other animals always spoke to them at parties.

No, the reason the beaver didn't have many friends was because of his buck teeth. No other creature in the woods had buck teeth like the beaver, and nobody liked them.

The other animals snickered at the beaver as he stood in the corner at parties. No one asked him to dance or offered him punch. Instead, they spoke in cruel whispers.

"Would you look at his teeth," the hawk would hiss to the owl and the rabbit. "Why, I think they're uglier than the last time I saw him. If he wanted friends, you would think he'd at least get himself a pair of braces."

The rabbit would twitch her nose in disdain. "I know," she would agree trying to hide her own teeth under her whiskers.

The beaver always went home sad from parties. He had very good ears, so he always heard what the other animals said about him.

"Braces indeed!" he thought. "I would never be able to cut down trees if I had braces put on my teeth."

He decided to ignore what the other animals said about him and get down to work. He built himself a nice dam before the cold winds of winter blew. He made a pile of sweet aspen bark for himself and stored it at the bottom of his pond.

That winter the beaver was warm and well fed. He didn't worry at all about what the other animals said about him. He knew that all the critters who had spoken cruelly about his teeth were fools. A beaver's buck teeth were a helpful tool in the forest, no matter what they looked like. The beaver grinned each night as he brushed his teeth.

"I am very lucky," he always thought to himself.

An old man lived in a shack deep in the forest. His tiny shack stood beside a musical brook. He didn't mind that his house was tiny or that the wind blew in under his doors. Even though he was cramped and often cold, he could listen to the music of the brook all day and night.

In his spare time, the old man made bells out of brass and silver. However, the bells he made were silent. Only the musical brook beside his shack could make the bells ring. Every evening the man would carry the bells he'd forged that day to the brook and dip them into its musical waters. The bells would go into the brook silent and come out ringing with song. It always made the man joyful to hear his bells ringing. What a beautiful sound!

New towns and villages were popping up all over the countryside, so the man's bells were in high demand. People wanted his bells for their clock towers and their churches. They wanted to hang his bells above their doors and set them on the corners of their desks.

The bell-maker could have been a very rich man. Because his bells rang more beautifully than any bells in the country, he could have set any price for them. Instead, the man charged very little for his bells. In fact, he gave many of his bells away for free. He gave entire octaves to orphanages and hospitals.

The bell-maker was very happy. However, he was also getting old. He could hardly lift the larger bells and carry them to the musical brook. It was time for him to retire, but before he could retire, he needed to train someone for his craft.

One evening a young man wandered up to his door. The bell-maker recognized the young man. He knew the young man was once rich and spoiled, but bad luck had stripped him of his fortune. The young man was now humble and wise for all his toils.

"I need food," the young man told the bell-maker.

"Yes," the bell-maker replied. "But you need much more than that. You need music, and I will help you."



Jenny brushed her doll's hair. She loved to look at it because the golden curls were so shiny. Jenny brushed it so often that sometimes she was afraid the hair would stop shining, but it seemed to get prettier every day.

Jenny also loved to talk to her doll. "Agnes," she said one day. " I think we should have a tea party today. You can wear your pink dress and white sandals." Jenny was very excited about her idea.

Jenny started to get ready for the party. She put on her fanciest dress. It had pink ruffles on it. She put on her socks that also had pink ruffles and her shiny white shoes. Jenny and Agnes both wore white gloves. They even had matching white straw purses to carry.

Sometimes Jenny's younger brother Michael wanted to join them, but Jenny always told him no. She didn't plan to invite any boys. They always spilled things, and they never knew what to say.

When everything was ready, Jenny brought Agnes to the table. It looked so pretty. The matching china cups and plates were set up just right. Jenny set a napkin on each of their laps.

As she started to pour the tea, she heard her mother calling her. "Jenny, will you please come here? I need some help folding clothes." Jenny looked at her doll sadly. " Well, Agnes," she said. " I guess we'll have our tea party tomorrow."

"I'll be there in just a minute," Jenny called to her mother. Jenny went to her bedroom to change. She took off her fancy clothes and put on jeans, a T-shirt, and sneakers. Then she changed Agnes's clothes and went to help her mom.

The next day Jenny's mom asked for her help early in the day. They worked together to get the house ready for company that night. Then Jenny's mom said, "Thank you for your help. Now you can do whatever you'd like."

Within minutes, Jenny and Agnes were in their fancy outfits again and having tea.

Many years ago, my family took a great train adventure. My mom and dad, my sister Rachel, and I lived in Minnesota, and my cousins lived in California. We traveled over two thousand miles by train to visit them.

Our trip began in Saint Cloud. At midnight, a whistle blew and a train with fifteen huge cars pulled into the station.

"All aboard," the conductor called.

He helped us into the train. We climbed narrow stairs that led to a second level. The car was dark, and people were sleeping. We walked silently through the rows of seats until we found our seats.

"Your seats lean back for sleeping," the conductor told us. He showed my sister how to move her seat. Next he gave us pillows. Mom took our blankets from her bag.

At first we were too excited to sleep. The train rocked from side to side and made clickety-clack sounds. Soon the rhythm of the sounds and the rocking made us sleepy. We finally dozed off.

For the next three days, the train was our home. We ate meals in the dining car or at the snack bar. Our seats became our beds. We washed our faces and brushed our teeth in a small bathroom. To pass the time, we played games or watched television in the lounge car.

We spent a lot of time looking at the scenery. We saw fields and prairies, mountains and forests, rivers and valleys, small towns and big cities. When we saw orchards of fruit trees, we knew we were near our cousins.

As we arrived at the train station, the whistle blew and the train slowed down. We looked out the windows for our relatives.

"There they are!" Mom exclaimed. Aunt Elizabeth and Uncle David waved, and our cousins Brian and Bridget jumped up and down. The train stopped, and we got off. Everyone gave each other a hug.

"Did you have a good trip?" Aunt Elizabeth asked us.

"It was great," we all answered.

Just then, the train whistle blew again as if to say goodbye.

Cazz the camel was used to making long treks across the desert. Cazz was very good at traveling. He could carry three people on his back, and he could carry a carpet on each hump. He could carry many bags and many trunks. Cazz was so good at traveling across the hot sand, he never had time to rest because people always wanted him to take them places.

Cazz would find himself walking north one day and south the next. Cazz was traveling so much that he was getting very tired.

"Oh, I need a holiday from all this hard work. All I do is carry people on my back. I know I am good at what I do, but that doesn't mean I can do it all the time. I want to lie on the beach for a while. I want to swim in the ocean and drink fruit drinks," Cazz said. "What I need is a nice long nap. Tomorrow I will ask my master for a vacation."

When Cazz got up the next day, he was nervous. He thought his master was a kind person, but Cazz wasn't sure his master would give him a vacation. Cazz worried about what would happen if he didn't get some rest. He knew, though, that the only way he would get a break was to ask. So he did.

"Yes, Cazz," his master said, "I know you work very hard. You may have a break. In fact, why don't you come with me? I know a very beautiful place down by the sea."

Cazz went with his master. He had a wonderful time. He swam in a swimming pool. He drank fruit drinks. He slept all through the night and late into the morning.

Soon enough, Cazz was ready to go back to work. Once again he walked north one day and south again. But now he was happy because he knew he was very good at his job and he knew his boss appreciated him enough to give him a vacation. He was sure he would get another one someday.

There was a great oak tree that stood on the corner of Colorado Street. All the local kids knew and loved the oak tree. They met there on evenings after school and on humid summer nights. The great oak was the headquarters for their clubs and the safe place for their games of tag and hide-and-seek. As long as the tree stood on the corner of Colorado Street, the children would have a place to meet and dream.

One day a man in a shiny black car drove down Colorado Street. He saw the children laughing on the corner, but his gaze was locked on the towering oak. The man's name was Mr. Gregory Greed, and he'd just had a wonderful idea. He immediately picked up his cell phone and made a call.

"We'll have to widen Colorado Street," he said to the person on the other end of the line. "Of course we'll have to cut down all the trees. That big one on the corner of Colorado Street will bring in a pile of cash." With a tiny smile, Mr. Greed turned off his phone and drove to his office across town.

The children on Colorado Street were shocked when they heard that Mr. Greed wanted to cut down all the trees and widen the road in front of their houses. They called an emergency meeting under the great oak right away.

"We can't let them cut down the trees," said a girl who was in sixth grade. "There must be something we can do."

"I know," said a boy. "We'll have everyone on Colorado Street write a letter to Mr. Greed. We'll tell him we don't want our trees cut down."

Another child nodded. "We'll make signs," he said. "We'll protest. We can't let them cut down our trees, especially this one," he said as he placed his hand on the oak.

The children wrote their letters and made their signs. They worked day and night to save the trees. Eventually, Mr. Greed saw that he couldn't beat the kids, so he gave up and decided not to cut down the trees.

Randy's parents were remodeling their living room. They'd already replaced the windows and painted the walls. Now all they needed was a new rug to put on the floor.

Randy's mom was very excited about getting a new rug. She had to wait for a few weeks for the messy painting to be done. Now she invited Randy along to help pick out the rug.

Randy gasped when they walked through the doors of the carpet shop. Rolls of carpet lined the walls, and rugs covered the floor. Some rugs cost a lot of money, and some rugs were cheap. Randy knew his mom wanted something in between.

Randy followed his mom around the shop as she looked. His eyes wandered around the shop and landed on a colorful rug laid out on the floor. The rug had a huge chair on each corner and a couch in the middle. A row of tassels lined each end of the rug. As Randy watched, the rug seemed to quiver under the weight of the four chairs and the couch. Surely, he must be seeing things. Randy took a step closer, but a salesman stopped him.

"Hello, lad," he said. "You don't want to buy that rug. That rug is very old and very ugly."

Just then, the chair on the far left corner of the rug wobbled off the rug and fell to the floor. The salesman smiled, took Randy by the arm, and led him away. He showed Randy and his mom a very boring brown rug that both he and his mom hated.

"What about this rug?" Randy's mom asked as she pointed to the colorful rug with the tassels. "How much is it?"

"It's not for sale," the salesman said.

"Then why is it in the shop?" asked Randy's mother. "Could we push aside the couch and chairs for a better look? I think I like it."

The salesman looked nervous, but he pushed aside the couch and chairs. The rug rippled once, and then laid flat.

"Yes," Randy's mother said. "I adore this rug. We'll take it."

The ice cold wind pushed against Nikki's face, making it difficult for her to keep her eyes open. Her mittened hands tightly grasped the handles of the sled. With each bump, her body bounced up and she had to reposition herself so she wouldn't fall off the sled as it sped down the snow-covered hill. Even though Nikki could barely see where she was going, her mouth opened wide in a huge smile, letting snowflakes land on her tongue.

Finally, the sled slowed down at the bottom of the hill. Nikki remained aboard the sled until it coasted to a complete stop. She rolled to the right, and her body landed on the soft, snowy ground. She rolled completely on her back and looked up at the cold, clear evening sky.

"Wow! That was awesome!" she exclaimed. "I have to do it again!"

"Look out!" yelled a voice. "Get out of the way!"

Without thinking, Nikki rolled her body toward her sled. She felt some snow fall on her neck between her cap and jacket as she heard another sled pass by.

"That was close!" Nikki thought to herself. "Mandy! Watch where you're going! You almost ran into me!" she cried.

"I'm sorry," explained Nikki's friend Mandy, "but I couldn't see where I was going! I didn't open my eyes until it was almost too late! That sure was fun, though. Are you ready to climb back up the hill and do it again?"

"Of course!" replied Nikki. "Let's go!"

They climbed the huge hill together in the clear, freezing night. The weather was calm, and the stars were shining ever so brightly. Snow was clinging tightly to the branches of the evergreen trees that lined the sled run. The snow crunched under their feet. The beauty of the night nearly overwhelmed the girls until they got to the top of the hill. Then they jumped on their sleds and flew off to the bottom again.

Most of Jamie's clothes were homemade. They were nice, and she liked them, but they were still homemade. It was a special treat when Jamie got a complete, brand-new, store-bought outfit. She thought the clothes were fashionable and couldn't wait to wear them to school.

On Monday, Jamie dressed carefully. Her new clothes made her feel confident and pretty. When she came down for breakfast, her mom told her how nice she looked. Even her dad looked up from the newspaper and admired her outfit. What a shock that was! Her dad never noticed stuff like that.

At school, only Jamie's best friend complimented her on her new clothes. Nobody else seemed to notice. Maybe they hadn't even noticed that she usually wore homemade clothes. In a way, that made Jamie feel better. But in another way, she was disappointed. In her new clothes, Jamie felt like a different person.

During the first class of the day, Jamie's teacher sent her on an errand to the school office. That had never happened before. "Maybe it's because I look more grown-up and responsible in my new clothes," thought Jamie.

In the school office, Mrs. Cruz smiled at Jamie. "New outfit?" she asked.

"Yes," answered Jamie, pleased that an adult had noticed. "What do you think?" she asked.

"It's lovely," said Mrs. Cruz, pausing. "But I admire all your outfits. It's always a treat to see what you're wearing. They're not the same boring clothes I see all around me. They seem to say, 'I'm Jamie Smith, a smart, artistic girl, and I'm proud of it.'"

On her way back to class, Jamie thought about what Mrs. Cruz had said. She stopped in the bathroom to look in the mirror. Mrs. Cruz was right. She did look a lot like the other girls, but that was what she liked most about her new clothes.

Then Jamie thought about her homemade outfits. Although they set her apart, maybe that wasn't a bad thing. Her homemade clothes showed her tastes and personality. She enjoyed picking out the material and helping her mom design the clothes.

The entire family was going camping. They had never been camping before. Everyone was excited to see what it would be like.

It took a whole week to prepare for the journey. Mother packed clothes and food. Father prepared the van, packed the tent, and read the map. The children packed activities and games for the long trip.

The family drove through forests and around lakes for hours. The scenery was beautiful, but the van was cramped. The family grew tired of the long drive.

Finally they arrived at the campsite. Everyone piled out of the van to explore the vacation spot. Brother wanted to be the first to catch a fish. Sister wanted to dive into the clear water and swim with the fish. Father and Mother wanted to rest and relax. However, the trip didn't turn out as planned.

First, Brother dropped the sleeping bags in a mud puddle. Then Sister fell off a picnic table and hurt her head. Mother forgot to pack spoons and forks, so the family ate potato salad with their fingers. Father forgot gas for the boat, so they couldn't go fishing.

"Camping is all about having fun and working together," said Father. Mother just smiled as she tried to cook hotdogs over a weak campfire.

When night came, the family slept in the muddy sleeping bags. Sister talked in her sleep, and Brother tossed in his sleep. Father snored in his sleep. Mother didn't sleep at all.

The family spent the morning riding bikes through puddles and exploring the woods. There was not a bird or animal around. Mother said birds and animals run from loud families.

After lunch, a storm blew through the campsite, tossing the tent into the lake. Hail dented the family van. Everything dripped with cold rain.

On the drive home, Mother slept and Father yawned as he drove.

"Why do we have to leave so soon?" the children whined. "We were having so much fun!"



Mr. Ward had an unusual job. He wasn't a teacher or a nurse. He wasn't a plumber or a cook. Mr. Ward wrote messages for fortune cookies. Mr. Ward and his wife owned a small restaurant. Children especially seemed to enjoy the fortune cookies served there. The restaurant was called Under the Willows because of the four huge weeping willow trees in its yard.

Every afternoon while Mrs. Ward cooked, Mr. Ward took a notebook and his best pen with red ink outside. He would sit under one of the willows near the pond. Then he would write the fortunes for that day's cookies.

The local children often came to play by Mr. Ward as he wrote. Mr. Ward would watch them run through the shadows of the willow trees. He would watch them splash in the warm water of the pond. It was easier for Mr. Ward to write fortunes when the children were near him and he could hear their laughter.

"Luck comes today in the form of a sunny smile," Mr. Ward wrote on a small piece of paper as he looked at the children's happy faces.

"An old man is wise, but a child is carefree," Mr. Ward wrote as he watched the children play.

Often the children approached Mr. Ward as he wrote.

"May we have a fortune?" they would ask.

Mr. Ward would then take out a handful of fortune cookies from his pocket. He would give one to each of the children. Some of the children cracked their cookies and read their fortunes right away. Others slowly nibbled on their cookies and saved the tiny slip of paper with the fortune that Mr. Ward had written for last.

Some of the children who gathered around Mr. Ward were still too young to read. They didn't want their older brothers and sisters to read the fortunes to them. They didn't want their parents to read them either. These children would hand their fortunes to Mr. Ward to read.

"A smile is the best of luck," he read to one little girl. Then they smiled at each other.

Jenny's father often went on business trips. Sometimes he was gone for only a few days. Other times he was gone for entire weeks. Even though he called every night, Jenny still missed her father. She was happy when he would finally come home.

Jenny always rushed to the front door when she heard her father's taxi approach the driveway. She would wait for him to open the door and jump into his arms.

"How's my girl?" her dad always asked as he gave her a big hug. "Did you miss me?"

"I always do," Jenny would answer.

"Were you a good girl? Did you listen to your mom and your teacher? Did you do all your chores?"

"I always do," Jenny would answer.

"I have something for you then," her father would say. He would reach into his coat pocket and pull out a beautifully wrapped present.

Every time her dad gave her a present, Jenny would carefully open it. First she would pull off the ribbon and, without tearing it, peel off the paper. Then she would open the box and giggle with glee. Her father always brought home the best presents from his business trips.

From the last trip he brought her a little glass globe with a tiny city inside. When you shook the globe, snow danced around the city.

"That's New York," her dad told her as he watched her shake it. "See that tall building in the center? That's the Empire State Building. It was once the tallest building in the world. Someday I'll take you there with me."

Jenny loved the glass globe with the tiny city inside it. "Dad, will you really take me there someday?"

"Of course I will, when you're older."

That night, Jenny studied her present before she went to bed. She picked it up, shook it, and watched the snow fall.

"New York City," she whispered as she closed her eyes to sleep.