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A Fly-Away Weekend

FEATURING **ARYAL™**

BY SUSAN HUGHES
ILLUSTRATED BY GÉRALDINE CHARETTE



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An Our Generation® book

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Chapter One

IT'S A PLAN!

Spider monkey, burrowing owl, red squirrel...

I thought some more, tapping on the kitchen table with my pencil. *Cougar, octopus, toucan...*

It was difficult to make a list of my favorite animals and keep it short. There are so many that I love—creatures of the air, the sea, and the land. I love wildlife of all kinds.

I also like to be organized. I like it a lot. Lists help me organize my thoughts, my time, and my goals. And it's good to be prepared.

Mom taught me that. So, I make lists whenever I can.

My animal list was done for now, so I reached for a new piece of paper and wrote a heading: *Aryal's Possible Future Jobs.*

I divided the page into three columns. At the top of each column, I wrote the name of a career I was



thinking about doing one day: environmentalist, vet or biologist.

Next, I would list everything I like about each of these jobs.

Sure, I may be only nine and I have lots of time to figure out my future. But like Mom says, it never hurts to be prepared.

Mom... I sighed and glanced at the calendar hanging on our refrigerator door. I had just flipped the page to the new month yesterday. It's now May, which is a busy time for Dad but especially for Mom. Even on Saturdays, like today. Sundays, too. Of course, I like hanging out with my friends, but they spend lots of time on weekends with their families—and I wish I could do the same.

“Hey, favorite daughter!” Dad sang out as he came downstairs.

I grinned. I don't have any brothers or sisters.

“Your mom just texted me that she won't be home to eat dinner with us. How about we wander down to the lake and say hi to your mom before we prepare our usual gourmet meal?” Dad suggested.

Another dinner without Mom. I was about to



make a comment, maybe complain a bit, but I didn't. Dad sounded cheerful about it, but maybe it bothered him sometimes too. He didn't get to spend much time with Mom either.

"Sure, Dad," I agreed, setting down my pencil and getting up. "Good idea."

"You don't mind if I pry you away from working on..." He glanced at the papers on the kitchen table. "Oh, you've made a list, and a chart! What a surprise! Hmmm... Who is it you remind me of again?"

He made a goofy face, so I'd know he was teasing me.

"Very funny, Dad," I said, making a goofy face back at him.

Dad really is funny. In fact, it's his job to be funny! He writes scripts* for a popular TV comedy show. Most of the time, Dad can work upstairs in his home office. He has lots of writing sessions and meetings with the other creators of the show, but mostly by video conferencing*, once or twice a week.

So, he does a lot of his writing on his own, when he wants to. His time is flexible, and that's perfect for our



family since Mom's time is quite tightly scheduled. It also means he can do other things during the day, like walk me to the school bus stop and back every day, make most of our meals, and do loads of house stuff.

Dad and I headed out the back door into the sunny warm afternoon. We walked down the path that leads from our house to the lake. I saw one of Mom's small planes take off from her little airstrip* and head east across the lake.

"Is Mom teaching today?" I asked Dad.

"Nope, that'll be one of the flight instructors. Your mom said she was doing paperwork all afternoon today," Dad explained.

Mom is a commercial pilot* who has her own flight school and sightseeing business here in Wisconsin. She has several small airplanes, including two floatplanes. A floatplane is basically a small plane with two floats underneath so it can land on water and not sink.

Mom and her three flight instructors teach people to fly on the wheeled planes all year round using the airstrips.

The lakes are frozen all winter, but when the ice



goes out in the spring, the floatplane side of the business really takes off! Mom and her instructors teach people to fly the floatplanes. They also take tourists up in them on sightseeing trips over the forests and lakes.

I'm really, really proud of Mom, and I love spending time with her and Dad—but Mom is always so busy. She's hardly ever free to hang out with us—or at least not for very long. I understand why, and I know she tries.

Just this past winter, Mom was extra-busy because she needed to supervise work being done on the airplane hangar. And now that it's May, the busy season for her flight school is in full swing*. But I really wish she and I could have some one-on-one time.

Both of the floatplanes, one yellow and one white, were tied up to the docks, bobbing on the waves. Sam, one of the flight instructors, was refueling the white plane. He saw us as we crossed the parking lot and waved to us.

“Hey, Aryal! Spencer!”

“Hey, Sam!” we hollered, and waved back.

I like Sam a lot—and his wife, Claudia. She's Mom's best friend and often babysat me when I was little. She's also an aviation mechanic* and works part-time for



Mom. Best of all, Sam and Claudia, and their dog, Beau, live on just the other side of the flight school.

When my friends come over, we can easily drop in to play with Beau. Or sometimes when I'm on my own, I'll go and hang out with Claudia if she isn't working.

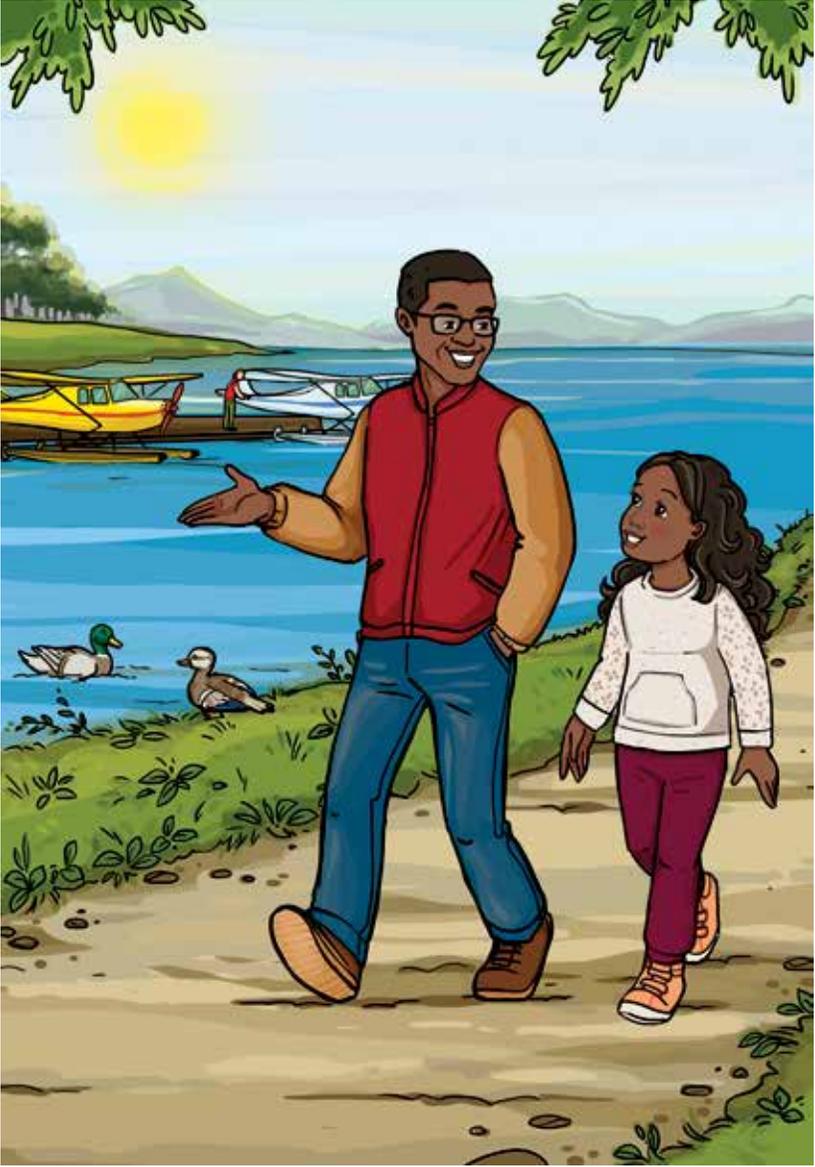
“The hangar is looking good; bigger and better,” Dad said to me, pointing. It was like a big garage, with its doors wide open. One of Mom's six-seater planes was inside. Another one was outside, near the small airstrip. The other two planes, both four-seaters, must have been in the air.

Dad and I went up the stairs to the second floor of the flight school building next door.

“Hey, you two! You're a sight for sore eyes*!” Mom got up from her desk and came around to give Dad and me big hugs. She apologized for not being able to make it home in time to eat with us, and then the phone rang. But she gave me another hug and a kiss before she hurried to pick it up.

Dad and I left, and went for a walk along the beautiful trail beside the lake before we headed home and began cooking up a storm*. It was fun, and it took my mind





off Mom not being there, which was probably Dad's plan.

After Dad and I ate and cleaned up, we prepared a special plate of leftovers for Mom. I heard her come home later while I was getting ready for bed. She and Dad talked for a while, and then Mom came upstairs to my room.

"Aryal, the dinner looks so delicious! You and your dad are the best," Mom said, sitting down on the edge of my bed. "But before I eat and do a smidgen* more work tonight, I have something I want to tell you."

"OK," I said. Inside, I sighed. She was going to tell me she had to work extra-hard for the next month. That we wouldn't spend much time together.

"In a couple of weeks, I'll have a weekend off," Mom said. "How about we go on a little overnight trip together, somewhere nearby, but somewhere special? Maybe we could go to Bonnivale to see their amazing wildlife center that you've always wanted to visit."

"Really?" I asked. I grabbed Mom's hand.

"I've looked into it," Mom said. "We can get up early on a Saturday and fly there in one of my floatplanes, and then land on the lake right outside Bonnivale. We'll spend two nights, visit the Bonnivale Wildlife Education



Center and do whatever else you'd like to do, and return home early enough on Monday that you'll only miss a few hours of school. It'll be short but wonderful. And your dad is totally happy for the two of us to go."

"Wow, Mom. Yes," I said. "I'd love to!"

Mom squeezed my hand. "OK, so we'll mark it on the calendar, and maybe you can prepare a list of activities you'd like to do on our trip. Is it a plan?"

"It's a plan, Mom!" I said.

"OK, well, good night, honey," Mom said, tucking me in and dropping a kiss on my head.

"Good night, Mom," I said, and I snuggled down under my blankets with a smile.



Chapter Two

GO WITH THE FLOW

Monday... Tuesday...

As the days led up to my big weekend with Mom, I x'd them off on our kitchen calendar. I was so excited, but also...well, a little nervous, I guess. Not about flying—I've been flying with Mom since I was a tiny baby. But because I wasn't sure I could count on our trip really happening.

What if the weather wasn't good enough to fly? What if something came up in Mom's schedule and she had to cancel?

Mom seemed a bit stressed, too. Even though we're only going away for two nights, it was clearly difficult for Mom to arrange it. Before she'd leave the house in the morning and when she came home in the evenings, I'd hear her on the phone, making plans for the time she'd be away.

I was on pins and needles*, hoping against hope



that Mom could keep her promise. I knew she was trying her best. But even Mom's plans don't always work out.

Sometimes she's needed for emergencies. Sometimes bad weather turns things around, and then Mom has to scramble. Sometimes she'll get an opportunity that is so great for her business, she can't turn it down no matter what else she has planned.

But night after night, Mom tucked me in and told me our trip was still on.

Soon, the x's on our calendar showed me it was Friday, the day before our trip.

Still, even now, I couldn't really relax. I sat on my bed, strumming my guitar. I guess I chose a sad song, because when Dad came in, he said, "Hey, why so blue? You're flying off on an adventure with your mom tomorrow!"

I smiled and strummed a happy-sounding chord*.

"I know what you're worrying about, but it's going to happen, Aryal," Dad said. "You've been really patient with Mom for ages. You never complain about how busy she is. But I know you two need time together. I've told your mom that I can help out at the office while you're





both away.”

He nudged me. “Not that I’d be able to give a flying lesson or take anyone up on a sightseeing tour.” Dad made a face. “But I could keep them laughing until you both come home, if need be!”

But while Dad was talking, I realized I had missed something really important. Somehow Mom and I had planned our two-day getaway on the same weekend as Dad’s birthday! His birthday was this coming Sunday. Why wasn’t it marked on the family calendar?

I jumped up.

“What’s wrong?” Dad asked.

“Hang on, Dad,” I said. I rushed downstairs to check.

I was right. On the calendar for tomorrow was written: *Aryal and Mom fly away!* And then for Monday it said: *Aryal and Mom land at home.* But there was absolutely nothing about Dad’s birthday. He was turning 40 in two days. I was certain.

Was Mom so busy she couldn’t even remember Dad’s birthday? And I was no better. I felt terrible, angry at Mom and myself.



I went back upstairs, with my head hung low.

“Dad,” I said. He was sitting on my bed, waiting for me, strumming my guitar. “Your birthday is this Sunday, but we haven’t planned to be home until the next morning! I’m sorry I forgot about it. Why didn’t you remind me?”

“Aryal, honey, it’s fine!” Dad said. Strum, strum. “It’s fine, absolutely fine.” He started turning his words into a wacky song. “Mom and I already talked about it. Even if you two come home Sunday, you’ll be too tired to do anything fun, so we’ll celebrate on Monday night. Really, it’s f-i-i-i-i-ine,” he wailed, landing on a really high note.

I giggled even as I said, “But Dad, it was such bad planning!”

“We can’t always control everything!” Dad teased me. “Sometimes things just go awry* and we have to go with the flow! Now, speaking of planning, are you packed? If not, get to it while I continue to serenade* you.”

Dad is actually a good guitar player with a great voice. Mom plays guitar too, or at least she used to when she had more time. And I’ve been teaching myself.

So, it was fun to listen to Dad sing and play as I got



ready for the trip. I gathered extra clothes since I wasn't sure if it would be warm or cold, or even wet or sunny, and I threw them into my suitcase. I tossed in my pajamas too. I put my sunglasses, my camera, and my binoculars into a little backpack. Then I figured I might as well get ready for bed. I brushed my teeth, and then added my toothbrush to the bag.

“Your mom will be late tonight and says not to wait up, but she'll see you bright and early tomorrow morning,” Dad said. He tucked me into bed and gave me a kiss.

For a while, I reread the list of activities I'd made for our trip, hoping Mom might come in before I fell asleep. But when I started yawning, I tucked it into my backpack and turned out my light.

“See you in the morning for our adventure, Mom,” I whispered.



Chapter Three

TAKEOFF!

“You’ll have a great time!” Dad said, as he drove Mom and me down to the lake.

We were so excited. Everything seemed perfect this morning. Mom had called in for a weather briefing* twice.

“The weather for the area where we’re headed looks good for today, with only a low probability of high winds tonight,” Mom told us.

And Mom gave me a really great present—my own flight jacket. It was just like her blue one, except mine was pink. I put it on right away.

She also gave me my very own headset.

“Pilots need headsets because we use them to talk to air traffic control. Also, it can be really noisy in the cockpit and they reduce the noise and protect our ears. And if we have passengers, like today”—Mom grinned at me—“and we’re both wearing headsets, we can also talk to and hear



each other!”

Mom and I jumped out of the truck with our gear, waved goodbye, and headed down to where the floatplanes were docked*.

“You two look like you’ve packed for a week!” Dad teased, just before he drove off.

Dad had made us lunches, some snacks, and a big thermos of apple juice. We each had a small suitcase and a backpack. Plus, I had brought the guitars—Mom’s and mine. I knew we wouldn’t have time on this trip to write a song together, like I’ve always wanted to do. But one of the activities on my list was to play our guitars at least once.

“We’ll use the smaller, four-seater floatplane, the yellow one,” Mom said, stopping beside it and setting down her bags. She pulled on the rope to move the plane closer. Then she stepped up onto one of its two pontoons*, opened the cabin door, and climbed inside.

I passed our suitcases, backpacks, and guitars up to her, and she stowed them in the back. Mom stepped back down onto the pontoon, holding two life jackets.

“Just to be safe,” she said, and we each put one on. She held out her hand, helping to steady me as I



stepped onto the pontoon with her.

“That seat is yours, Aryal. I put a cushion there, so you’ll be high enough to see over the dash and out the window,” she told me, smiling.

While I slid over Mom’s seat to get to mine, Mom untied both the ropes from the dock. She gave a big push with her foot to float the plane away from the dock, and she climbed up and sat beside me. She pulled the door closed behind her.

Mom and I put on our life jackets, our seat belts, and our headsets. “All set?” she asked me, speaking into the microphone in her headset. I could hear her. I gave her a thumbs-up.

Mom turned on the engine, and the propeller* on the plane’s nose began to turn.

Mom slowly pushed a lever on the dashboard, and the plane moved forward across the water.

I was a bit apprehensive. Once in a while, I fly along with Mom in her other planes, the ones with wheels, when she’s taking people up on tours. But I’d never been in a floatplane! Now it was just the two of us in this tiny plane on the water. I totally trust Mom, but... I was a nervous



passenger.

We taxied* until we were near the middle of the lake, which was empty. No boats or other planes. Mom turned the plane's nose into the wind.

“Um, is the water a little wavy today, Mom?” I asked through the headset. “Won't it be bumpy?”

“Don't worry, Aryal. It will be a bit bouncy, but I only fly when it's absolutely safe,” Mom reassured me. She turned in her seat to look more closely at me. “But if you've changed your mind, and you'd prefer that we go some other time when there isn't any wind at all, we can.”

“No, no!” I said, immediately. There was no way I was going to postpone this for another time. “I definitely want to go now!”

It was a bit bouncy when we took off, but soon we were airborne*, flying up and up and then leveling off. It was so amazing to look out through the big windshield and my side window. The view was incredible!

The trees were all beginning to get their leaves. We'd left our lake behind, but there were more lakes below us, sparkling in the early morning sunshine.

Mom and I had agreed to take a long route to our



destination so we could enjoy the scenery.

I smiled. It was good to finally spend some time with Mom. We chatted about what we might do after we had dinner at the hotel, and I told her about the list of plans I'd made for tomorrow, including going to the wildlife center of course. We also pointed out the sights to each other—I saw a loon* and Mom showed me a moose!

But Mom had to answer quite a few radio calls from the flight school. She frowned while she talked and jotted down a few notes.

Luckily, I remembered my camera. I pulled it out of my backpack and began snapping photos.

“It’s so gorgeous!” I told Mom, and she nodded, giving me a thumbs-up.

At noon or so, Mom pointed out a pretty little lake below.

“I thought this would be a special place for us to have lunch,” she said, speaking into the headset. The lake was perfectly calm and Mom made a perfect landing. She steered the plane toward a deserted sand beach, cut the motor when we got close, and we glided up onto the shore.

We had a picnic in the sunshine. We ate our





sandwiches and drank our apple juice. Mom asked me questions about school and my friends, and she told me some funny stories about when she was my age. It was amazing.

Off we headed, back up into the sky again. We only had a short distance to go now and I was getting excited about hanging out with Mom at our hotel and visiting the wildlife center the next morning.

But then, Sam radioed from the flight school. He and Mom talked briefly.

A short time later, Sam called again.

“Oh, Aryal, I’m sorry,” Mom said to me after the call ended. “We’ll have to land somewhere. There’s a problem at the office. I need to have a long conversation on the phone, and I don’t want to be so distracted while I’m flying.”

“That’s OK, Mom,” I said.

Mom chose a nearby lake where she knew we could refuel. She soon had us down, taxiing toward a little marina* in a bay.

We both got out, and while the marina attendant filled the plane with fuel, Mom talked on her cell phone,



frowning. I walked along the lakeshore, kicking at stones. Maybe the scenery was nice, but I was fretting too much to appreciate it.

Then—

“Bad news, Aryal,” Mom said. “We need to head home. It seems there are problems back at the office that only I can handle. I asked Sam to call the hotel and cancel our room reservation.”

“But can’t Dad...?” I began.

“Honey, they need *me*,” Mom said. “I’m really sorry, but we’ll have to do our overnight and wildlife center visit some other time.”



Chapter Four

HOMeward BOUND

I was disappointed, of course, but I tried to look on the bright side. At least we'd be home for Dad's birthday.

Mom paid for the fuel and called for another weather report. The wind had picked up a bit, and they told her there was now a 30 percent chance of a storm moving in. But Mom said she wasn't worried. That was still low, and we were heading home anyway.

We were climbing into the plane when the marina attendant called out to us, "Oh, I meant to mention—a local couple is missing. The Winterbottoms left on a canoe trip a week ago from a nearby state park and planned to be back yesterday afternoon. They haven't turned up, and we're worried. Did you happen to notice any emergency flares while you were flying here? I know it's unlikely you'd see them in the daytime. But..."

"No, I'm sorry. We didn't," Mom said.



“I wonder...” the attendant hesitated. “Any chance you could do a quick search of the area in your plane before you head away? Since you’ll be up there anyway?”

Mom glanced at her cell phone, probably checking the time. Floatplanes need to land before dark, because there aren’t any landing-strip lights on lakes.

But I piped up. “Sure, we can. Right, Mom?”

Mom looked surprised. I usually don’t put her on the spot like that. But today was different. I didn’t really want to go home yet, and if we did a bit of a search, Mom and I could spend more time together. I didn’t even care about the higher chance of a storm coming.

“Alright,” Mom said, nodding at me. “Just a quick look around. It’s beginning to get late.”

We climbed in and took off, and soon we were flying in a large circle over lots of lakes that all looked connected. I peered out the window with my binoculars, searching the water and shorelines, looking for flares*.

It was pretty exciting. I was really hoping the couple were OK *and* that we could be the ones to find them!

But we did a complete loop and didn’t see anything.

“We should head back now, Aryal,” said Mom.





“Really?” I asked. “Mom, can we just look a tiny bit longer?”

Mom hesitated.

“If it’s safe...” I added. “I just really want to help these people, don’t you? And today was meant to be our one-on-one time together.”

That did it. “OK, just one more small circle around this lake,” Mom said.

But, oh wow! A short time after, through the binoculars, I spotted a canoe beached on the shoreline of a wide sandbar with one big lake on one side and a narrow waterway on the other. A little cottage was almost hidden in the woods nearby—and two people were running to the shore, waving their arms at us.

“That’s it, Mom! The canoe!” I cried. “Right there. And those must be the lost canoeists!”



Chapter Five

RESCUE

“Aryal, it seems a storm is coming in fast. We’re going to have to land,” Mom said.

“Oh!” I said. That definitely wasn’t in the plan.

“The radio probably won’t reach the marina from a lower altitude,” Mom explained, “so I’ll quickly radio the marina owner while we’re still in the air and let him know we think we’ve spotted the couple and that they seem fine.”

She made the call, adding that she’d call from her cell phone later and confirm.

Mom frowned a little as she got in position to land the plane. There were lots of clouds now and the sky was getting dark. The winds had picked up, and so had the waves. But we made it down and taxied to shore—just as the rain started.

The couple that had waved to us ran over. “We’re



so happy to see you!” they cried.

“You must be the Winterbottoms, and we’re happy to see you, too!” Mom said.

Mom asked me to wait inside the plane. She jumped out with two ropes. She and the canoeists pushed and pulled to get the plane partway onto the beach. They attached the ropes to the plane and tied it to a nearby log, right next to the canoe.

Mom came back into the plane and told me we’d be staying the night with the Winterbottoms. She and I grabbed our suitcases and backpacks and climbed out onto the beach.

Mom quickly introduced me to the couple.

“I’m Jessica and this is my husband Arnie,” the woman said to me, with a smile. “Now, let’s get you both out of this rain.”

Mom and I followed the couple along a path through the woods toward the little cottage I’d spotted from the air. The rain was heavier now, but the forest canopy* protected us.

We were almost at the cottage when I lost my grip on my backpack and it dropped into the underbrush*.



I stooped to pick it up, but as I reached for it, I heard something rustling in the leaves.

A snake? I pulled my hand back quickly.

But, *chirp, chirp...* A baby bird?

I picked up a stick and carefully moved aside the leaves. It was a baby squirrel! Tiny and chirping!

“Aryal?” Mom called. She had come back. “Are you OK? What have you found?”

“Mom, it’s a baby squirrel. A red squirrel, I think. Look how tiny it is!” I looked up, searching the tree branches above. “Maybe it fell out of a nest high up in one of these trees. But I can’t see. And I don’t see a mother squirrel around anywhere either.”

“Come on, honey,” Mom said. “Let’s go inside and get dry.”

“But Mom,” I said, “the baby is all alone, and it’s getting dark and chilly. There’s no sign of its mom, and there must be lots of hungry animals around. Mom, we have to help it.”

Mom hesitated. I could almost see her thinking how much she wanted to make me happy after canceling the rest of our trip.





“Everything OK?” called out Jessica from the cottage’s porch.

“Yes! We’ll be right there,” Mom called back.

“So, OK, Aryal,” she said to me, reluctantly. “But tomorrow morning, when the weather’s better, we’ll try to find the squirrel’s nest and return the baby to its mom.”

Mom pulled her flight gloves out of her jacket pocket and gently picked up the squirrel. I opened my backpack and Mom set it inside. I carefully held the backpack as we hurried on to the cottage.

Jessica found a little cardboard box and some old, soft cloths and I tucked the baby squirrel inside. I placed the box by the fireplace to get warm and watched him fall asleep.

Soon, we had changed into dry clothes. It was dark outside and still raining, but Arnie opened some cans of stew and cooked them over a camp stove. Jessica built a fire in the fireplace. She lit two big propane lanterns that made wide, cheerful circles of light.

As we ate, the Winterbottoms explained what had happened to them.

“We’d had a wonderful few days of canoeing. We



love these lakes, and we come on camping trips here often, portaging* from lake to lake,” Jessica said. “But yesterday, when we were traveling down quite a fast river from the lake north of here into this lake, Loon Call, I dropped my paddle and *swoosh!* It was gone before I knew it.”

“So, I was the only one paddling,” Arnie said, “and it was slow going. We knew our friends had a cottage on this shore, so we tried to head for here. But high winds came up and there we were, in those big waves with only one paddle.

“Well, we had a moment where we thought we might capsize*.” Arnie looked at Jessica. “In all the kerfuffle*, it seems I lost *my* paddle!”

“When we finally drifted to shore up the lake a ways, we were able to walk the shoreline down to here, floating the canoe along with us,” Jessica said, as Arnie enjoyed another spoonful of stew. “We pulled our canoe in and easily found the cottage. We stayed last night. Our own food had almost run out, but our friends always leave supplies in case there are emergencies like this, so there’s lots to eat.”

“It’s a lovely little cottage,” said Mom, glancing



around, dabbing at her mouth with a napkin.

“Isn’t it?” agreed Arnie. “There’s no electricity, but we have our camp stove and camp lanterns. And there’s lots of firewood stacked up. Blankets, bedding...”

“Of course, there’s no road, so we haven’t had any way to get home. We were hoping someone would come by, and here you both are!” Jessica said, grinning at Mom and me.

“Well, we always keep at least two paddles in our floatplane. Sometimes we need them to maneuver* the plane when we’re on the water. We actually have two extras we can give you,” Mom said. “And tomorrow, if the weather is better, you can paddle out.”

“That’s wonderful,” said Arnie. “Thank you so much. I’m quite certain we’re only a three-hour paddle from where we first put in. And if Loon Call Lake is too choppy*, there’s the smaller, shallower Solace Lake on the other side of the sand bar. It makes a curve but feeds back into Loon Call, right down near the dock where we left our car.”

Jessica explained they had taken a cell phone with them, but its battery had run out before they realized they



needed help. She asked if they could borrow Mom's cell phone to call their families and tell them she and Arnie were safe.

"Oh, of course!" Mom said. "I meant to call back the marina owner and confirm we'd found you both and that you were alright. I'm just realizing that, in all the excitement, I forgot! I can't believe it."

I was surprised, too. It wasn't like Mom at all.

Quickly, she handed her phone to Jessica, who went to a quiet spot with Arnie to make the calls.

Jessica and Arnie returned shortly. They said they'd managed to speak to their family, and the marina owner. They'd also called their friends who owned the cottage who said we should all feel free to stay as long as we needed to, and to make ourselves at home.

Mom hurried off to phone Dad and Sam, but she was only gone for a few minutes.

"I got Dad, Aryal. I told him we were safe and sound and had to land on Loon Call Lake because of bad weather. I told him we won't be home tonight—and then the signal failed," she said. "But I'll call him again in the morning before we head off."



We all cleaned up, and while Mom and Jessica went out to bring in more logs, I checked on the little squirrel. He was still sleeping. I wondered if he was hungry. Well, tomorrow we would find his mom and she could feed him. I tried not to worry.

After some more chatting, we all headed to bed. Mom and I shared a room with bunkbeds.

I was tired, but I had a hard time falling asleep. The trip was not going as planned. What about all the activities on my list? Spending two days and nights alone with Mom? Seeing the wildlife center with her? Playing guitars and writing a song together?

All my careful plans had gone out the window!

But as I finally felt myself drifting off to sleep, I thought, *At least we're still away and not heading back home quite yet...*



Chapter Six

FAREWELL!

When I got up the next morning, it was still raining. I lay in bed for a few minutes. I knew the baby squirrel would probably go back to his mom today, but I wanted to name him anyway. Red, I decided. I would name the baby squirrel Red.

I jumped out of bed to check on him.

“Good morning, Aryal,” said Jessica. She was making coffee on the camp stove. “Your mom and Arnie are out checking that the plane is still secure. Oh, and your little one is awake.”

Chirp, chirp...

“I think he must be thirsty, but I’m not sure how I can give him water,” I said.

But Jessica had a great idea. She had seen an eyedropper in the cottage’s first aid kit. She suggested I fill it with water, and then the tiny squirrel would be able to



drink from it.

“We don’t have the proper milk for him, so just give him water with a little sugar and salt,” she told me. “This one’s eyes haven’t opened yet, and he can’t sit up. He only has fur on his front but not his back. He’s probably only about three weeks old.”

“How do you know so much about squirrels?” I asked.

“When our children were your age, we’d take them camping, and twice, they found baby squirrels that needed a little human help,” Jessica told me, handing me an oven mitt. “Wear this so you don’t get bitten by the little guy, although it’s probably not even possible. His front top teeth aren’t in yet and his front lower teeth are only just starting to come in.”

Red was so small, sweet, and wiggly! I put on the oven mitt, put the eyedropper to his mouth, squeezed—and it worked. With his eyes closed tight, he put his little paws on the dropper and sucked down some water.

Mom and Arnie came in, shaking the rain off their jackets.

“So, the plane and the canoe are still safe and



sound!” Mom said, after giving me a good morning hug and peeking in at Red. “Oh, and I loaned our two extra plastic emergency paddles from the plane to Jessica and Arnie.”

“Yes, Jess, it looks like we’ll be OK to leave whenever we want,” Arnie said. “There’s still some rain and Loon Call Lake is rough, but Solace Lake is much more protected from the wind, as shallow as a marsh, and calm. With our two new paddles, if we leave early this afternoon, we can easily be home by nightfall.”

Jessica smiled and handed around coffees to Mom and Arnie.

“As for us, Aryal,” Mom said, “even if the rain stops, it doesn’t look like the wind is going to die down. That means the waves are much too high for us to tackle today. We’ll be spending at least one more night here.”

“Could we help you pull the plane over the sandbar so you can try to take off from Solace Lake?” Jessica asked.

“No,” said Mom. “The plane is much too heavy, and Solace Lake is too shallow and narrow.”

Mom looked disappointed, and I was too.



But then I realized, *That means Mom and I can spend the day alone together after all!*

Sure enough, shortly after we had some lunch and Jessica and Arnie had packed up, the rain stopped, but the wind was still high. Loon Call Lake had huge waves and looked quite scary. I was glad we weren't going to try to fly out on it. But when Jessica and Arnie carried their canoe over the sandbar to the shore of Solace Lake, it only had a few gentle waves.

Mom offered to pay for staying at the friends' cottage and using their food, but Arnie said, "I'm sure our friends won't mind—truly. Especially when we explain that you only ended up being here because you were helping to look for us. And that you rescued us with your paddles!"

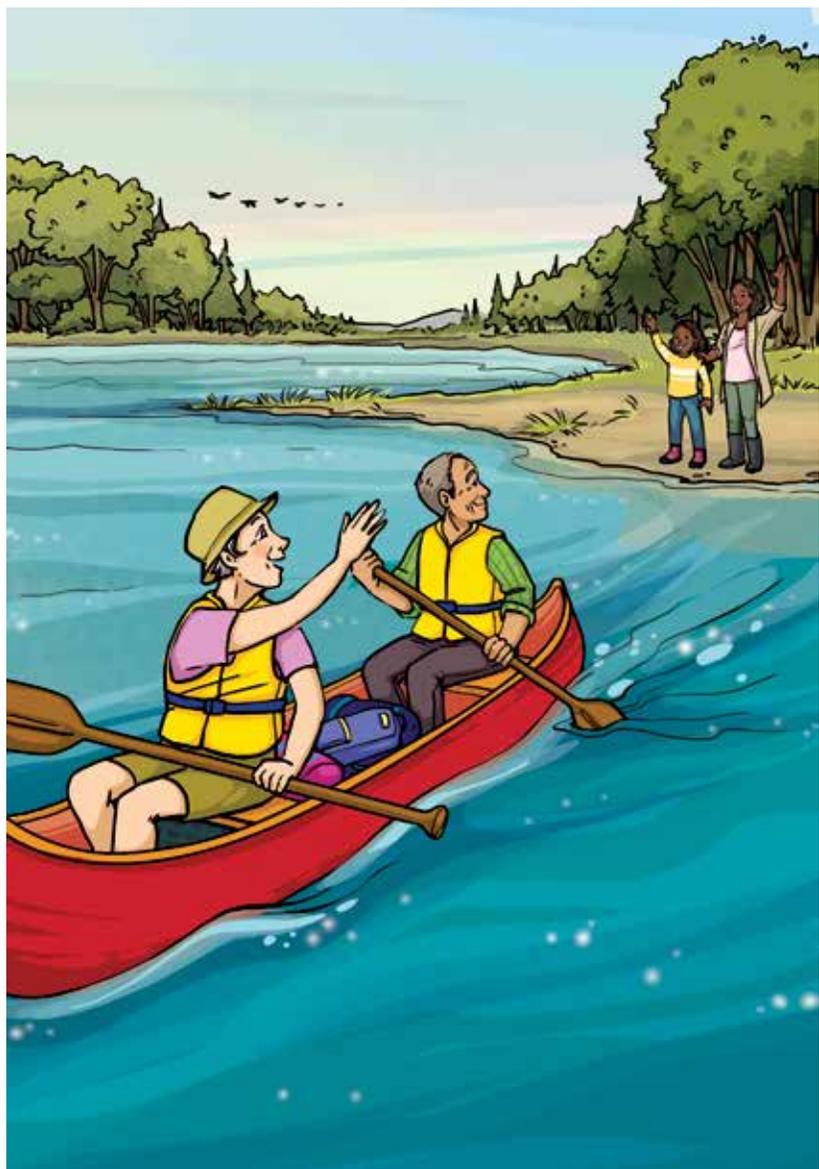
They thanked us again for the paddles. Mom said we wouldn't need them back in a hurry, and so we all agreed we would plan to meet up for lunch sometime in the summer, and they could return the paddles then.

"Oh, and Aryal," said Arnie. "Feel free to look through the big chest in the living room. Our friends keep their children's toys, crafts, and games there."



“Goodbye!” called Jessica, as she and Arnie paddled away. “We’ll talk to you soon about getting together, and Aryal, you can let us know what happens with Red!”





Chapter Seven

UNPLANNED STOP

“Aryal, I’ll just give Dad a quick call and I want to check in with Sam on the difficulties they’ve been having,” Mom said, when we were back in the cottage. “Hopefully we can get a signal now that the weather’s a little better.”

“And don’t forget to say happy birthday to Dad,” I told her. “Remember, it’s his birthday today!”

“Of course!” Mom said.

Mom punched in the numbers on her phone. “Yup, got a signal,” she said.

Dad picked up right away. Mom explained that the weather was still bad, and we’d be safe staying here until it let up, although it was hard to say how long...

“Mom!” I whispered loudly. “Tell him ‘Happy Birthday!’”

She started to, but—

“Oh,” she said. “My phone’s out of power. I need



to charge it. I should have done that last night.”

Charge it?

Mom headed for our room to get her phone cord, I guess, but I called out, “Mom, hang on. We don’t have any electricity here. You can’t charge your phone.”

Mom stopped. “Oh, my, of course I can’t,” she said, slowly.

I felt a little panicky. One more thing we hadn’t planned for.

Mom had a bunch of work calls she was supposed to make, even though we were on a weekend getaway. And I wanted to say happy birthday to Dad. And now we had no way to communicate with the outside world. Mom was usually organized and ready for anything...

“Mom, won’t Dad worry about us? And what if something goes wrong here? What if we need help? What we will do?” I said. I folded my arms and squeezed.

Mom smiled reassuringly. “He knows we’re OK now and that we’ll have to stay here until the weather changes.”

She came and hugged me.

“Hopefully the wind will die down tomorrow, and



we can head home,” she said. “But until then, guess what? I’m totally and officially on a work break.”

A work break? Mom?

“What we can’t change, we must accept. We can’t make phone calls, but we’re smart and sensible. We’ll just have to figure things out on our own for now! Now, let’s see how Red is doing,” Mom said.

Our plan was still a mess, but suddenly I felt better.

Red began squeaking as soon as we moved his box. We gave him a little more sugar-salt-water, and he fell asleep again, looking quite content.

“Jessica taught me lots about baby red squirrels, but I wish I knew more,” I said. “I can’t use your phone to do any research though.”

“Hey, Aryal. Let me introduce you to a very old-fashioned, but very helpful, source of information.” Mom grinned and swept her hands wide, indicating the books lining the shelves of the cottage bookcase.

It turned out that one whole bookshelf was set aside for books about wild animals. I took an armful and settled down on the couch.

Meanwhile, Mom picked a book from the shelf and



sat down to read for fun.

“I used to read all the time,” she told me. “But I haven’t made time to read a novel* since... I can’t remember when!”

Mom and I read all afternoon. I learned that mother squirrels almost always come back for their babies, but they don’t venture out at night. Baby red squirrels begin to look more like squirrels between three and four weeks. Their fuzz begins to become more like fur. Their eye slits are almost ready to open. They don’t become quite active until they are seven or eight weeks old.

When I couldn’t find more about squirrels, I read about rabbits, deer, foxes, and wolves, too.

Our stomachs started growling, so Mom and I went to the lake to check on the plane. We grabbed the snacks we hadn’t eaten yesterday and our guitars. When we returned, Mom lit the two big lanterns and we headed for the kitchen.

“Let’s see what we can find for dinner,” Mom said. We opened cupboards, peeked in the pantry, and assembled some canned foods and packages of dried ingredients. Together, we had fun concocting a very



delicious dinner on the cottage cook stove. We made tuna noodle casserole, green beans, and corn.

While we ate, Mom said, “You know, Aryal, it’s possible the weather will be fine tomorrow. But the wind may stay high for some time. We might not be home for several days.”

“OK,” I said. “But what about school?”

“I’m sure you’ll catch up quickly when you’re back. Plus, you’ll be doing lots of learning here—just think what you’re already learning about caring for squirrels and creative cooking!”

Part of me was excited. More time with Mom, a mom who couldn’t do any work at all! But part of me was anxious. All that time completely unplanned?

So, when Mom offered to do the cleaning up, I pulled out the list I’d made before our trip.

“Let’s choose some things we can do tomorrow and even the next day if we end up staying here,” I said. “I’ll read out the list of the things I’d planned for us to do with our free time at Bonnivale after seeing the wildlife center. We can pick some of the ones we like best.”

I began: “Number one. See the new movie about



leatherback turtles that's on a giant screen.”

Not possible. I crossed it out.

“Number two. Share a banana split with chocolate syrup at the soda shop.”

I crossed it out.

“Number three. Visit the children's bookstore in town.”

I crossed it out, too.

We were stuck in a cottage in the wilderness. We couldn't do any of the things on this list!

“Hey, Aryal.” Mom came over and put her arms around me. “It's OK. This will be a special time. We have the chance to find new things we like to do, together. And right now, there's something I'd like to do with you.”

Mom opened the big toy chest in the living room and pulled out a deck of cards. “I'd like to teach you some of the card games I used to play when I was your age,” she said.

“OK,” I said, feeling better.

Mom and I played cards for ages, until I started to win every single hand!

Then I had an idea. I got our guitars from the



bedroom.

“Oh, Aryal,” Mom said, shaking her head. “I’m so rusty*! I haven’t played in ages!”

“Don’t worry, Mom,” I said. “Let’s just strum some chords together. I’m sure it’ll start to come back to you.”

Mom was reluctant at first, and she got kind of frustrated when she couldn’t remember the correct way to hold her fingers or what strings to play. But I joked with her, and she laughed and kept trying.

Soon, it was getting dark.

I gave Red another drink of water while Mom made a fire in the fireplace. Mom and I got our pajamas on, and Mom asked if I wanted her to read to me. She chose a children’s book of short stories about wild animals from the bookcase, and she and I cuddled up on the couch. I put my head on Mom’s shoulder as she read to me by the light of the fire.





Chapter Eight

YOUR MOM IS BUSY RIGHT NOW

“Nope, we won’t be flying home today,” Mom told me the next morning. “It’s sunny but still very windy.”

Mom and I had eaten a quick breakfast. I had put on the oven mitt and given Red some sugar-salt-water with the eye dropper. He sucked it up, hungrily. It made me happy to see him eating!

Mom and I had checked the plane to make sure it was secure. And I had taken Red out to look for the tree where I had found him. Sure, enough. A collection of sticks, twigs, and leaves lay broken on the ground nearby. The winds must have knocked Red’s nest from the tree!

I looked around to see if any other baby squirrels were nearby, but I couldn’t see any. And of course, I looked up. But I couldn’t see a new nest.

Well, I had to try. I didn’t know what else to do.

So, I placed Red under the tree and waited nearby,





hoping his mother would appear.

An hour or so later...nothing. Poor Red. “I’m sure your mother is just busy right now,” I reassured him. “She’s probably working hard making you a new home and will come for you soon.”

I headed back inside with the squirrel. We would try again tomorrow morning.

I placed Red and his box in a sunny area of the cottage. But...now what?

I was nervous because Mom and I didn’t have any plans for the day. At all. But I also felt sort of excited. Just because we didn’t have plans, it didn’t mean we couldn’t think of something fun to do. In fact—

“Hey, Mom,” I said. “Do you want to go on a hike? I found a bird book yesterday. I can bring the binoculars, and we can look for birds and other signs of wildlife.”

“Sounds good!” Mom said. “Why don’t I make peanut butter sandwiches with the supplies we brought along with us in the plane? I’ll throw in our apples too. We can have a picnic. And don’t forget to bring your camera!”

Soon, Mom and I were walking along the narrow trail made by the owners. It led us through tall pine trees



and up to some open land on the top of a hill. It was really beautiful. Many of the birds that had migrated* south for the winter were coming back north again.

We found a perfect spot to sit, watch the birds, and eat our lunch. When we headed off again, the path led us down to a marsh. We walked around the edge of the marsh and saw turtles and frogs.

The path looped back in the direction of the cottage. It took us down to the shore. We skipped stones. We took photos of each other. We took our shoes off and dared each other to wade in the freezing cold lake water. I had never seen Mom laugh so much!

When we reached the cottage, I fed Red again. I was so excited. He managed to move around on his own a little for the first time. He was getting stronger!

Mom and I concocted another kooky* menu for dinner, and the two of us ate by candlelight, just for fun.

“Ah, Aryal,” Mom said, “I’m worried that I’m working too much, that my business means I can’t spend enough time with you and your dad. Maybe I should rethink the flight school.”

I didn’t say anything, but I was thrilled. If Mom sold



her business, we'd be able to spend lots of time together, just like today.

But Mom sighed. She looked so sad even talking about it. "I won't make up my mind right now," Mom said, "but I'm going to give it some serious thought."

Mom began asking me about the things that I love and care about, like wild animals and protecting them and their habitat. She asked me what made me care so deeply about them. She asked what animals I like most, and why.

I talked on and on, and Mom listened closely. It was wonderful.

As we tidied up, we talked more about missing Dad's birthday.

"I was hoping we could buy Dad a book for his birthday when we got to Bonnivale. That was one of the things on my list," I said.

"I'm sure your dad will understand why we couldn't get him a gift," said Mom, reassuringly.

"I have another idea, though," I said. "A change in plan!"

Mom grinned.

"Would you help me plan a special gift for Dad?" I



asked. “Would you write a song with me, and we can play it on our guitars and sing it for him?”

Mom only hesitated for moment.

“Sure,” she said. “Let’s try for some easy chords though!”



That evening, after checking on the floatplane and feeding Red again, Mom and I sat in front of the fire with our guitars, strumming chords and singing little tunes.

When Mom decided to read for a while, I picked up my notebook and a pen. I began to jot down words and phrases that we could turn into a song. I sighed, happily.

But then I wondered, *Will the wind die down tomorrow? Will we leave the cottage and our special time together?*

I wasn’t sure what I wanted anymore.



Chapter Nine

CHANGE IN PLAN

“Let’s paint!” I cried.

The day was windy but sunny. Earlier, I had fed Red and taken him outside to wait under the tree for his mom to come, but she never showed up. *Maybe she’s still repairing her nest*, I thought.

Then Mom and I headed out for a hike. We chose a different trail this morning and came back cheerful and tired. We ate lunch, and while Mom relaxed on the porch, I spent more time on the song lyrics.

But when I opened the chest to look for more scrap paper, the poster paints, paintbrushes, and art paper caught my eye.

“We can set up an art studio, Mom,” I suggested.

And so, we did!

We cleared the big wooden dining table and set up our studio there. I even found a smock for each of us.



Soon we were painting up a storm. I did five paintings of Red, showing him healthy again and back with his mom. I did two paintings of the view from the floatplane on our way here, and I did three of our walks in the woods.

Mom painted three paintings of her, Dad, and me at different ages, two paintings of the view of the lake from the top of the hill yesterday, and about five paintings of colorful flowers.

“Now, let’s get ready for the show!” I told Mom.

“The show?” she asked.

I led her outside to the sunny clearing behind the cottage, protected from the wind. She helped me tie long lengths of string from tree to tree, making something like a clothesline. When the paintings were dry, we used clothespins, which I’d come upon in a kitchen drawer, to clip the paintings to the strings. We stood in the middle, surrounded by our art.

“Now, pretend we’re the judges. We’ll score each painting, and pick four grand prize winners,” I explained.

“I love it!” Mom said, clapping her hands.

Our final selections? Two of Mom’s paintings and





two of mine, of course.

“I know,” said Mom. “Why don’t we give these four paintings to your dad for his birthday? It’ll make it even more special.”

I hesitated. “But I’ve changed that plan twice already,” I said. “First, I was going to give Dad a book. Then we decided we’d sing him the song we’re writing for him...”

Mom nodded quickly. “You’re right,” she said. “Maybe the song is best.”

But I thought a little longer. “OK, Mom. Change in plan!” I cried. “We’ll sing him our song *and* give him our paintings.”



The next day went by too quickly. I couldn’t believe what a good time we were having.

Of course, I was worried about Red. I took him back out to the tree where I found him, hoping his mom would come and get him. But a curious—and maybe hungry—raccoon appeared, so I took the little squirrel back inside.



In the afternoon, I tried again. I saw an adult red squirrel on the branch listening to Red's squeaks. Was she Red's mother? She made her way toward the trunk, as if she might come down to greet him, but a fox came sniffing through the underbrush. I was excited to see a fox so close up, but I had to rescue Red again before the fox snapped him up for lunch.

Mom and I went for another hike in the beautiful sunshine and worked again on the music and lyrics for Dad's song. We played cards, and board games, and talked and talked, just the two of us.

I didn't even remember to ask Mom if she had thought more about selling her business. I was just so happy to have her all to myself right now! It felt like our time together would never end.



Chapter Ten

GOODBYE, RED

“OK, ready, Mom?” I said. “One, two three...” Mom and I began strumming our guitars to the beat of “Our Big Love for You.”

That was the name of our song for Dad. I’d made a clean copy of the lyrics, and I’d written out the chords, too. Now we were doing a final run-through to see if it was ready to go.

It was Thursday, four days past Dad’s birthday, but we wanted to be all set for when we finally got home. The wind was still strong when we had gone to check the plane a few hours ago, but even while we were outside, we could feel it was easing up.

“Sing it, Aryal,” Mom cried.

I began singing the first verse, and Mom and I continued through the whole song. When we got to the chorus for the last time, we really belted it out*.





*“You’re our special birthday guy. You’re truly one of a kind,
So, we’ve written you a song, and we hope that you don’t mind.
You’re our champion and hero, you’re our moon and our sun,
Whatever age you reach, you’ll always be our NUMBER ONE!”*

“Hey, that’s not bad,” Mom said, giving her guitar a final strum.

“Ya-hoo!” I exclaimed, setting down my guitar. “Dad’s birthday song is finished, and it sounds good!”

But Mom didn’t answer. She was listening.

“What is it, Mom?” I asked.

“It’s so quiet. No wind, Aryal.” Mom jumped up. “I’m going to check. It may just be that we can go home!”

Mom rushed outside, but I sat where I was.

Did I want to go home yet? What would happen to Red? What would happen with Mom and me? How long would it be before we had time alone again for painting, cards, stories, hikes, and cooking together?

“Honey,” Mom said, coming back inside. “I think we can start packing up. The wind is almost completely gone, and the water is calm. We can head out as soon as we’re ready.”



“But, Mom. Red...” I said, jumping up. “What about him? I have to make sure he gets back to his mother.”

“Of course, Aryal,” Mom said, putting her hand on my shoulder. “We won’t go until he’s back home, safe and sound.”

I nodded, a lump in my throat. Mom was always so understanding. She was the best.

“I’ll take him to his tree now,” I said. “It might take some time, or it might not even happen today.”

“I know, honey. Don’t worry,” Mom said. “I’ll do some packing. You go and sit with Red.”

I’m not sure what was different about this morning. I gently lifted Red out of the box and placed him under the tree. I went and sat under a tree close enough to rescue him, if necessary, but far enough away not to scare his mother. Maybe Red’s mom was all done with her work and had rebuilt her nest. Maybe I was hoping the hardest I’d ever hoped—because Red began squeaking.

And this time, almost right away, a perky red adult squirrel came hurrying down the tree trunk. She ran straight to little Red, grasped him in her teeth by the



scruff* of his neck, and headed back up the tree with him.
She flicked her tail as she and her baby vanished.

“Goodbye, Red!” I cried out.



Chapter Eleven

A SURPRISE LANDING

We were in the air again!

Mom did a small circle over the cottage and waggled* the plane's wings, like a silent goodbye. We headed off, but...

"Mom, are we going the right way?" I asked into my headset.

"That depends on our destination," she said, with a grin. "We're very close to the wildlife center. I thought we'd pop in for a quick visit. We can still be home by evening."

"Oh, Mom!" I cried. "Thank you!"



As soon as we landed and tied up at the lake near Bonnivale, we found a power outlet for Mom's phone and



called Dad. He'd been patiently waiting for us to fly out. He was excited to hear we'd be home that evening.

"I'm so sorry we missed your birthday, Dad," I told him.

"Honey, seeing you both tonight will be the best birthday present ever," he said.



The wildlife center was just as wonderful as I'd imagined. It turned out Mom had arranged for a special tour for us last Saturday. When we arrived and explained why we'd been delayed, the head guide, Nora, offered to give us our special tour right then and there.

They had displays of animals from all around the world. Nora took us to see the displays of some of my favorite animals: spider monkeys, all kinds of owls, red cougar, octopus, toucan, and, of course, red squirrels. She knew so much about each animal!

I told her about Red and explained how I'd cared for him. She said I'd done just the right thing. She was happy to hear that his mother had come back for him.





“Perhaps the nest fell from the treetops in the high winds,” she said. “The mother squirrel may have been building a new one nearby shortly after you found Red, and maybe it took her some time to move any other babies to that nest and then come back to find Red.”

Nora talked to me about my top three career choices: to be an environmentalist, a vet, or a biologist. She explained what each job might be like and what I might like most about it.

“But how did you know these are my favorite animals and my top career choices?” I asked Nora, as we were saying goodbye and thank you to her.

“Your mother sent me a list several weeks ago when she first arranged your visit,” Nora explained.

I was surprised—not that Mom was so organized but that she knew me so well!

As we headed back to the plane, I slipped my hand into my mother’s hand and squeezed. “I love you, Mom,” I reminded her.

“I love you, too, Aryal,” she said, softly.



Chapter Twelve

HAPPY BIRTHDAY, DAD!

Mom and I touched down on the lake just before dinnertime. Dad met us down at the docks and greeted us with big hugs. That night, Mom and I had a great time telling him all about our adventures.



The next day was Friday. I was in luck because it happened to be a Teacher Workshop Day, so no school—and Mom and I had more special plans! She headed to the flight school first thing in the morning, like normal, and Dad and I spent the morning together.

But his friend Mitch called and asked him to play tennis in the afternoon. Dad almost said no, because he wanted to be home with me, but I talked him into going.

“I’ll hang out with Claudia,” I told him. “I want to



tell her all about my adventure with Mom.” In fact, the whole thing was part of the plan. Mom and I had made some phone calls to Mitch and Claudia from Bonnivale!



“Hey, Dad!” I called, waving as Dad pulled up in our car. Claudia and I had been watching for him.

“See you later, Claudia,” I told her with a wink, and went running out.

“Hello, Aryal!” Dad said. “Sorry, I’m late. Mitch insisted on checking out the new rackets in the pro shop after tennis...”

“That’s OK, Dad,” I said.

We talked about his game as we drove the short distance home and then headed into the house together. Dad set down his gym bag and asked, “How was your afternoon with Claudia, Aryal?”

I grabbed his hand. “Hey, Dad, can we chat about it in the living room?”

I led Dad into the next room, and—

“Surprise! Happy Birthday!”



Dad’s mouth dropped open. Mom was there, of course, and lots of Dad’s friends and our neighbors, including Mitch and Sam, were all clapping and cheering. Claudia came hurrying in too!

Mom and I had decorated the walls with the four paintings from our trip that we had specially picked out for Dad.

“Dad, Mom and I did these paintings for you—and one more thing, too,” I said.

Mom and I picked up our guitars, which were close at hand. Everyone smiled and stopped talking.

“One, two, three...” I began, and Mom and I started strumming the chords of “Our Big Love for You.” Like we’d practiced, I sang two verses and Mom sang two, and we sang the chorus together:

*“You’re our special birthday guy. You’re truly one of a kind,
So, we’ve written you a song, and we hope that you don’t mind.
You’re our champion and hero, you’re our moon and our sun,
Whatever age you reach, you’ll always be our NUMBER ONE!”*

When we finished the song, everyone clapped. Dad



had tears in his eyes.

“That was beautiful. Thank you!” he said. “But... who arranged all this? And how?”

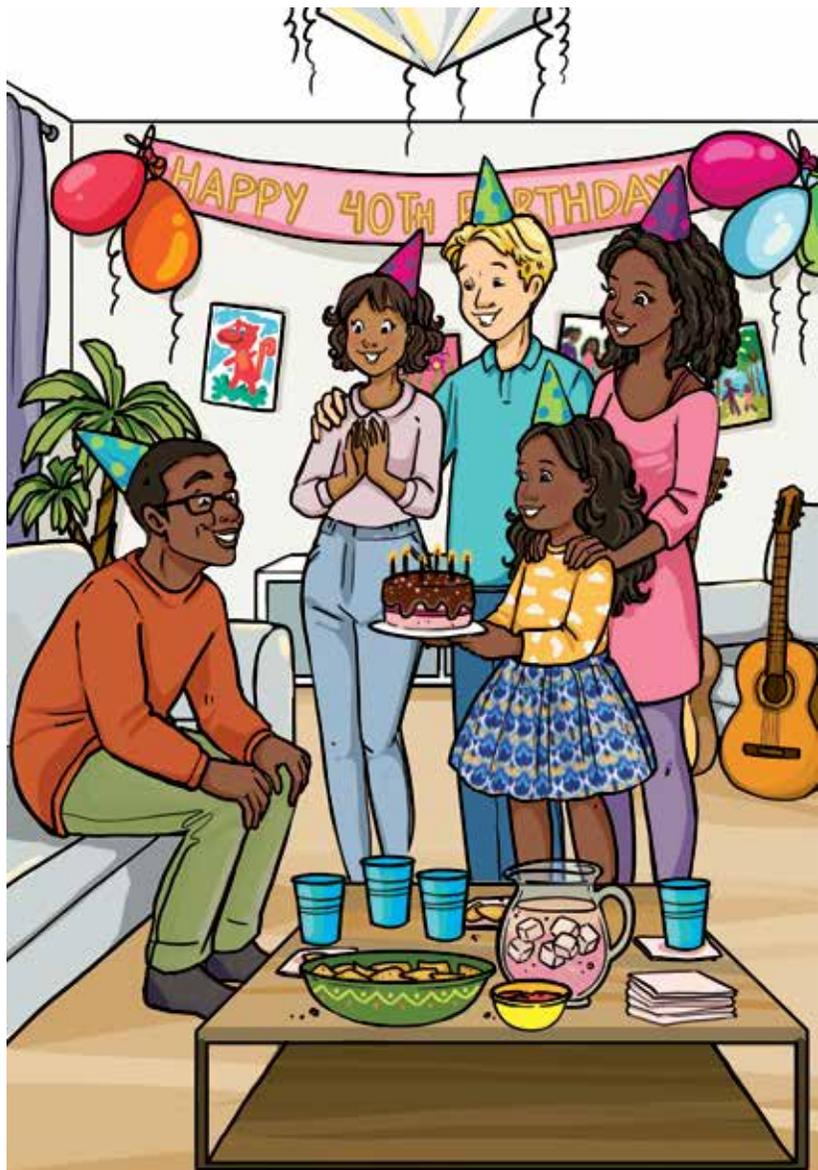
“We did,” Mom said. “Aryal and I. We made some calls before we left Bonnivale last night. Easy-peasy*. Aryal and I are the best organizers on the planet—and, well, Mitch and Claudia helped out—and all your other friends were ready to drop everything to be here for you.”

“Well, I’m almost speechless,” Dad said. “*Almost*—but of course not quite! Thank you, my wonderful wife and daughter.”

I grinned at Dad and hurried to get the birthday cake. Mom lit the candles, and I carried it over to Dad while everyone joined in to sing the birthday song. Dad made a wish and blew out the candles. Mom and I took the cake to the kitchen to cut pieces for everyone while Dad began chatting with his guests.

Mom had picked up the cake in the morning. Then Claudia had helped me get the ice cream and balloons while Dad was playing tennis with Mitch, who was in on the plan. Mom, Claudia, and I had come home, put out all the plates and forks, and decorated. We had ice cream in





the freezer, all ready to go.

Afterwards, I'd gone back to Claudia's with her, so Dad wouldn't get suspicious. We were super-organized, for sure!



Later that night, Dad read me a bedtime story. He thanked me again for the fun afternoon before saying goodnight. A few minutes later, Mom came in.

“Good work, partner,” she said. We high-fived, and she kissed me goodnight.

But as she was about to leave, I said, “Mom, can you wait a minute? There's something I need to tell you.”

I hadn't planned it. I hadn't thought it through. But I knew I had to say this to Mom right now.

“Mom, I think you should keep your flight school business,” I told her. “It makes you so happy. I love spending time with you, but you need to keep following your dream.”

Mom didn't say anything for a minute. She asked, “Are you sure?”

I nodded. “Absolutely sure.”



“Aryal, thank you for being such a special girl,” Mom said. “I would really love to continue running my school and taking out my tours, but I need to spend more time with you—and with you and Dad.

“I blocked off time this morning to talk to my team. While you and I were away, they managed to keep up with the flying school activities really well. They sorted out almost every problem when I wasn’t there to do it myself,” Mom said. “They’ve convinced me I don’t need to spend as many hours there as I’d thought. And today, I posted an ad for a new pilot to cover some of my tasks!”

“That’s great!” I said.

“So, I’m reorganizing my schedule. And let’s also make sure we have some *unplanned* fun together too, like we did on our very special week at the cottage!” Mom grinned. “From one of the best organizers on the planet to another, I promise you things will be different. What do you say?”

I jumped out of bed and gave Mom a big hug.

I will always like being organized, but now I knew how much fun it was to be spontaneous*. After all, sometimes when plans go awry, good things happen!



Glossary

*Many words have more than one meaning. Here are the definitions of words marked with this symbol * (an asterisk) as they are used in this story.*

airstrip: *an area on the ground on which airplanes take off and land*

airborne: *moving through the air*

aviation mechanic: *a person who services, maintains, and repairs airplanes*

awry: *in a way that was not planned*

“belted it out”: *sang loudly*

canopy: *branches and leaves that have spread out at the tops of trees to form a cover*

capsize: *to turn over in the water*

choppy: *having many small waves*

chord: *a group of musical notes played together*

commercial pilot: *someone who has a license to fly a plane carrying people or cargo and is paid for their work*



docked: *tied up to a dock*
easy-peasy: *very easy*
flares: *bright lights that are used to attract attention in emergencies*
“in full swing”: *at its highest level of activity*
kerfuffle: *a fuss*
kooky: *unusual*
loon: *a large bird that lives on water and dives for fish*
maneuver: *move something in a careful way*
marina: *a harbor with docks that offers services for small boats (and floatplanes)*
migrated: *moved from one habitat to another, often because of the season*
novel: *a book about people and things that happen that are not real*
“on pins and needles”: *nervously waiting for something that is supposed to happen*
pontoons: *hollow cylinders underneath a floatplane that make it float*
portaging: *carrying a canoe between two bodies of water*



propeller: *a shaft with two or more blades that turn very fast, causing a plane to move*

rusty: *unable to do something as well as you used to because you haven't done it in a long time*

script: *the written story of a TV show, with descriptions of scenes and lines that the actors speak*

scruff: *the back of an animal's neck*

serenade: *to entertain someone with a song*

“sight for sore eyes”: *someone or something you feel happy to see*

smidgen: *a small amount*

spontaneous: *to do something without planning or thinking ahead*

taxied: *moved slowly along the water before takeoff or after landing*

underbrush: *shrubs and small trees that grow under larger trees*

“up a storm”: *energetically and enthusiastically*

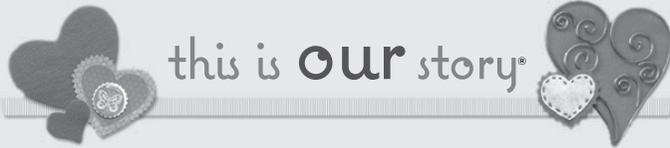
video conferencing: *having a meeting with two or more people using online live video*



waggled: *moved with short movements up
and down*

weather briefing: *a brief prediction about weather
conditions in an area that might affect a flight*





We are an extraordinary generation of girls.
And have we got a story to tell.

Our Generation® is unlike any that has come before.

We're helping our families learn to recycle, holding bake sales to support charities, and holding penny drives to build homes for orphaned children in Haiti. We're helping our little sisters learn to read and even making sure the new kid at school has a place to sit in the cafeteria.

All that and we still find time to play hopscotch and hockey. To climb trees, do cartwheels all the way down the block and laugh with our friends until milk comes out of our noses. You know, to be kids.

Will we have a big impact on the world? We already have. What's ahead for us? What's ahead for the world? We have no idea. We're too busy grabbing and holding on to the joy that is today.

Our Generation® brings imagination into everyday life, and empowers children to create the narrative of their generation.

Yep. This is our time. This is our story.

ourgeneration.com



About the Author

Susan Hughes is an award-winning author of more than 30 children's books, including picture books, chapter books, young adult novels, nonfiction books for all ages, and even a graphic nonfiction book. Susan is also a freelance editor and writer.

She helps coach and guide other writers in revising and polishing their own manuscripts.

About the Illustrator

Passionate about drawing from an early age, Géraldine Charette decided to pursue her studies in computer multimedia in order to further develop her style and technique. Her favorite themes to explore in her illustrations are fashion and urban life. In her free time, Géraldine loves to paint and travel. She is passionate about horses and loves spending time at the stable. It's where she feels most at peace and gives her time to think and fuel her creativity.



A Fly-Away Weekend became the book that you are holding in your hands with the assistance of the talented people at Maison Battat Inc., including Joe Battat, Dany Battat, Véronique Casavant, Loredana Ramacieri, Sandy Jacinto, Cynthia Lopez, Laurie Gaudreau-Levesque, Alexandra Bonfà, Ananda Guarany, Jenny Gambino, Arlee Stewart, Natalie Cohen, Joanne Burke Casey, and Pamela Shrimpton.

A Fly-Away Weekend

Aryal™ loves hanging out with her dad, who works from home most of the time. But she wishes she could spend more time with her mother. Mom owns her own flight school and floatplane business, which means Mom often works long hours and can't be around as much as she would like to be.

So, Aryal is thrilled when her mother suggests a weekend getaway—just the two of them. And Dad is all for it, too! Aryal, who loves making lists and planning, happily starts creating their schedule.

But not long after they take off in Mom's floatplane, plans begin to go awry. Will Aryal and her mom have to turn around and head back home? Or is there a surprise landing ahead?

It's impossible to separate **Our Generation**® characters from the generation of girls who read about and play with them, for they are one and the same.

They're changing the world by making their households greener. They're baking cupcakes to help charities. They're writing in their journals, practicing for recitals, doing cartwheels down the block and giggling with their friends until they can hardly breathe. **Our Generation** is about girls growing up together. "This is our story" reflects the community of these amazing girls as they laugh, learn and create the narrative of their own generation.

Ages 7 and up

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