



Betsy-Tacy and Pterodactyls

Fanfiction by Theresa Jarosz Alberti

To Milwaukee... and Beyond!

Betsy and Tacy are on an adventure,
beyond Lincoln Park, beyond even Little Syria!
Join them on their long journey through a world
of dinosaurs to solve a troublesome mystery.

Will they finally reach Milwaukee...
and can they get home in time
to save Deep Valley?



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Fanfiction by Theresa Jarosz Alberti

Based on the Betsy-Tacy series by Maud Hart Lovelace

*Dedicated with Love
to the Founder of the Feast:
Maud Hart Lovelace,
and the many wonderful Betsy-Tacy fans
I've come to know*

Betsy-Tacy and Pterodactyls

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Author's Note:

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The story I tell here about Betsy, Tacy and Tib is my own invention, and it is (obviously!) not part of Maud Hart Lovelace's story canon. This story is for entertainment only and is not part of the official story line. I am not profiting financially from the creation and publication of this story. No copyright infringement is intended.

I am grateful to Ms. Lovelace for her wonderful stories about Betsy-Tacy. Without her books, my story would not exist, and my life would be far less rich in numerous ways!

About the Author

Theresa Jarosz Alberti grew up in Minneapolis, Minnesota, knowing she wanted to be a writer at age 10, inspired by girl-writer-characters like Betsy Ray and Harriet the Spy. She's been a writer ever since.

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Preface

National Novel Writing Month is an online challenge to write a 50,000-word novel during the month of November. After several years of penning contemporary fiction for NaNoWriMo, I decided to try something lighthearted: fanfiction. I took my beloved world of Betsy-Tacy and mashed it up with something else I'm fond of... dinosaurs. Well, why not? I didn't know where the heck it would lead, but I wanted to write something fun.

The Betsy-Tacy series includes 10 books by Maud Hart Lovelace, who grew up in Mankato, Minnesota, in the early 1900s. Maud fictionalized her childhood and young adulthood life, following herself ("Betsy") and her friend, Frances Kenney aka Bick ("Tacy"), from their meeting at age 5 through the early years of their respective marriages. The books are full of their adventures, their friends and families, life in the Edwardian era, and issues of growing up that are universal to any time period.

The Betsy-Tacy books were my childhood favorites. Betsy wanted to be a writer, as did I, and I coveted her supportive family life and circle of friends. I had no idea these books were autobiographical. Deep Valley (her fictional name for Mankato) wasn't on any map. I was an adult before I learned the historical truth and found other fans of the series. I joined the Maud-l email listserv in 1994 where hundreds of Betsy-Tacy fans gathered online, and sometimes, in person. This community has been an important part of my life ever since.

As for the dinosaur parts of this novel, what can I say? Ever since I was a kid, I've been fascinated by dinosaurs. One of the first poems in my poetry book, *(After) Confession*, is called "Ode to Triceratops," about the time I spent sitting next to the triceratops skeleton at the Science Museum of Minnesota. It was fun to imagine what it would be like if some humans got a chance to co-exist with dinosaurs.

What began as a lark, something fun to write, grew into something larger and more meaningful for me, and I hope for other readers. Having the girls go on an epic

adventure to save their town led to a variety of experiences, new people to meet, and opportunities to explore. I really like the growth arc this created.

If you read this novel but haven't read the Betsy-Tacy series, I'd love to hear your feedback. My hope is that it is still an entertaining read, even though you may not get the backstory or a few inside jokes. Nothing would thrill me more than providing a side-door introduction to Maud Hart Lovelace's beloved Betsy-Tacy books.

~Theresa Jarosz Alberti

Betsy-Tacy and Pterodactyls

Chapter 1: Betsy Wants a Pet

The late morning sun was climbing the sapphire blue sky over the Big Hill. Soft wildflowers waved on the summer breeze among the tall green grass. It was warm and sunny yet devoid of the humidity that made Minnesota summers at times unbearable. It was the perfect day for a Betsy-Tacy picnic.

Walking up the Big Hill always made the girls hungry. They'd both asked for picnic lunches from their mothers, and they'd combined those delectables together into the tan woven basket with a handle and covered lid from Betsy's house. They had a tin pail from Tacy's house with cocoa inside to heat up once they settled down to eat. They were 12 now, old enough to responsibly start a small fire, and make sure it was out when they were through.

Betsy and Tacy had been friends ever since they were 5 years old. Sturdy with short brown braids, Betsy Ray had lived in the little yellow cottage on Hill Street since she was a baby. Just before she turned 5, a big family had moved into the white house across the street. Betsy was soon to learn that this was the Kelly family, and that the bashful little girl with red ringlets was the same age as Betsy, and her name was Tacy. When Betsy's mother said she could have a 5th birthday party, Betsy promptly invited Tacy and her older sister Katie. Tacy was so shy, Betsy hadn't been sure she would actually come. But come she did, holding tight to Katie's hand, and before the party was over, Tacy was holding onto Betsy's hand, marching around the house in time to the music Mrs. Ray played on the piano. Tacy gave Betsy a little glass pitcher with a gold rim

on it for a birthday present, but as Betsy always said, the best present Tacy gave her was the gift of herself as a friend. Ever since then, Betsy and Tacy had been almost inseparable.

They climbed the hill together now, as they had done countless times before, each grabbing hold of the picnic basket between them. Tacy carried the old battered tin cocoa pail with a wooden spoon sticking up out of it, and Betsy carried a thick piece of branch from the woodpile in back of their barn. This would be the main fuel for their small fire... they counted on finding twigs and leaves for kindling once they got to the top of the Big Hill. Betsy had a few matches in her dress pocket to help them start the fire.

"Mama made ham sandwiches for us," said Tacy, who, after that 5th birthday party, was never shy with Betsy. "She put in some of her unfrosted cake, too."

Betsy smacked her lips. "Mmm, my favorite. My mama gave us hard boiled eggs, pickles and 2 big molasses cookies. I'm suspecting we won't starve."

"Oh, especially not with the cocoa," said Tacy. "Funny how I still want to have hot cocoa on a picnic, even if it's hot outside."

"It wouldn't be a picnic without cocoa." Betsy looked sideways at Tacy, raising her eyebrows to give a hint that she had some sneaky news. "I did bring something else along..."

Tacy, who'd been distracted by Betsy's little sister Margaret when Betsy had added her items to the picnic basket back in the Ray kitchen, raised her own eyebrows in question. "What? What did you put in there?" She gave a tug at the basket and tried to push the lid back.

She let Tacy take the basket and set it on the ground. "Oh, go ahead, take a look." She smiled mischievously.

Tacy pried up the wooden lid, then saw the pile of green leaves cushioning all the picnic food beneath. "Is this... spinach?" she asked, turning to look up at Betsy with questioning eyes.

"Oh yes it is!" said Betsy triumphantly. "I was reading at the library last week, and Miss Sparrow and I were talking. She told me that microceratops really like spinach." Betsy paused as if Tacy surely knew why that was important.

"Okay..." said Tacy, long and slow. She looked like she was thinking-thinking-thinking, trying to see if she was forgetting something she should know. "I, uh, oh, shoot. You'll have to tell me. Why do you want to feed a microceratops?"

Betsy's eyes lit up. "I really really want one for a pet. Ever since Pixie the cat died last spring, we haven't had any animals around besides Old Mag. And she's gone with Papa so much of the time. Microceratops are little. They're pretty cute, the way they walk around on two legs, and it's almost like they have a crown on their head. I bet we could even make some doll clothes for them -- wouldn't that be fun? It's about time we had a dinosaur for a pet!"

"So your mother said yes?" asked Tacy, her face brightening at listening to another one of Betsy's ideas. Tacy sometimes had ideas too, but Betsy seemed to be a regular font of ideas, and they were often unusual and certainly creative. Not always, however, parent-approved.

"Well, not exactly," said Betsy slowly, but she fiercely wouldn't let her excitement be dimmed. "I thought we could try to catch one first, with the spinach I picked from our garden. Then I could find a way to convince her. Maybe if she sees how adorable our microceratops is, she'll find herself saying yes before she even realizes it."

Tacy shrugged. She was too good a friend to tell Betsy she was living in a fantasy world, but that was obvious anyway. Instead she said, "okay, why not? You never know. If anyone can convince your mother, we can."

Betsy smiled, satisfied.

The Big Hill was true to its name -- a tall, steep, wonderfully large grassy hill, one of many in Deep Valley, Minnesota. To a visitor, it might seem like a lot of work to climb, but Betsy and Tacy had marched up and down the Big Hill so many times during their friendship that they hardly gave it a thought, even when they were carrying a picnic basket full of a hearty lunch AND spinach, not to mention a pail of cocoa and a thick branch. Climbing the Big Hill had certainly made them strong.

Betsy hoped it meant they were strong enough to catch a microceratops... but she wasn't really sure if they needed to be strong; maybe it was necessary to be quick and clever. Well, she was sure they'd know by the end of the day.

At the top of the hill, they walked through the Secret Lane and around the far side until they found a spot for their picnic. There was a nice spot off to the side where the grass had been worn away in one area, so they could easily make their fire there, without having to worry about burning anything they didn't want to. There were even some large rocks for them to sit on. They both set about getting their picnic ready, old pros that they were. Tacy started by finding the cloth in the bottom of the picnic basket, laying it out and then setting out the food (leaving the spinach in the basket for later). Betsy started setting up the fire, gathering twigs and dried grass and leaves for kindling, and then using her match to start the fire. There hadn't been any rain for a while, so there was plenty of dry material and first there was a thin wisp of smoke, then a little flame leapt

up. Betsy always liked that moment, when the fire appeared almost out of nowhere. It was a little like magic, she always thought.

She set up the little metal wire tripod over the fire and hung the pail of cocoa over it, give it a few stirs before she joined Tacy on the blue and white checked cloth. "I'm starving," she said. The idea of a picnic always made their appetites increase. "Let the feast commence!"

Tacy nodded, reaching for a sandwich. "The only thing missing is Tib."

Betsy was peeling a hardboiled egg, which were a staple of their picnics. She frowned, letting herself enter the space of Tib-less-ness for a moment. "Yeah, that's for sure," she acknowledged. They shared a moment of silence to honor Tib's absence, which they both felt keenly. "It's just not fair she had to move back to Milwaukee."

"No sir-ree Bob," agreed Tacy.

It had been a blow when Tib had told them at the end of the school year that she was moving away. Betsy and Tacy and Tib had been friends since Betsy and Tacy had met Tib when they were 7 years old. The three had been best friends ever since, enjoying a special relationship that threesomes often can't manage. They had had three weeks of summer together before Tib moved, and at first they were all in shock. It hit them hard. They spent the first few days moping around, saying, "I can't believe it," over and over again, feeling like they were carrying boulders around with them day and night.

"Tell us again why you have to move," Betsy had asked. She already knew the answer but she was trying to actually understand it.

Tib had pursed her lips grimly. "There are some wild dinosaurs near Milwaukee causing a disturbance. Papa's been called in to control the situation. He's one of the best, and now they've hired him to be head of the Dino Control Patrol."

"But what about us?" Tacy had questioned. "Deep Valley needs Dino Control too. And we need you!"

Tib had sighed heavily. Which led to a great sigh from Betsy, followed by a long sad sigh from Tacy. They lay back on the hitching block to the side of Tacy's house, a favorite hangout spot. It was hard being children, when you had little or no control of your own life.

But then Betsy had sat up quickly, then jumped to her feet to stand on the hitching block. Both Tib and Tacy looked up at her with wide eyes.

Betsy struck a pose with one arm raised, one finger pointing skyward. "Lookee here! Yes, Tib, you're moving, and we only have a few weeks left before it happens. We can lie around sighing and feeling sad, or we can squeeze every last minute of fun out of our time together. Which will it be?"

Both Tacy and Tib had jumped up to join Betsy. "Fun! Fun!" they shouted. It had been an exhilarating moment. It felt like they'd thrown those boulders of sadness off their shoulders, and were suddenly light as balloons. They'd promptly gone on a walk downtown to people-watch and see if anything new was happening. They saw a man trying to ride an ankylosaurus down Front Street. It looked like he'd had a special saddle made up, with a thick mat covering the knobby bony armor on the back of the dinosaur. He was sitting up tall in his suitcoat and bowler hat, but had a frustrated frown all over his whole face, obviously because the ankylosaurus was moving so slowly, he might as well have been riding a turtle. Betsy, Tacy and Tib had held their hands over their mouths to keep from showing their laughter.

After that day, the girls had spent Tib's remaining weeks in Deep Valley in one fun adventure after another. Sadness and grief kept trying to creep onto them, and if they

were still and quiet, like when they watched a sunset from their bench together, they had to shake it off and not let it stick to them. One of them would get up quick and say, "Okay, what next?" And while many times Betsy was the one to come up with their adventures, Tib and Tacy were stepping up to the plate much more now. They had to, if they were going to keep "squeezing every minute of fun" out of their time.

They wrote, created and performed another play, a melodrama. They had done this many times before and it was a favorite activity of theirs. Little blond curly-headed Tib was a fantastic dancer, so they always managed to work in a dance number for her. Betsy had a flair for overly dramatic parts filled with emotion, so they made sure to include something like that for her. And Tacy was surprisingly good at being deep and mysterious. She lost some of her shyness when she acted, so they included a part like that for her too. Which made for a very eclectic play! The new summer weather was sunny and mild, so they put the play on outside using blankets strung up between two trees in Tacy's yard for a curtain. They charged pins for admission.

Betsy smiled now on the picnic blanket, nibbling on the hard-boiled egg, remembering all the fun they'd had before Tib left. She shook away the very sad part about Tib saying goodbye, about watching her ride away in the back of the carriage with her family, about her and Tacy smiling pasted-on smiles to cheer her up and shouting how they'd write her so many letters. In fact, they'd immediately gone off to a shady spot in Tacy's yard to write a fat juicy letter to Tib, so she'd get it by the time she got to her family home in Milwaukee. They'd torn several sheets from Betsy's writing notebook and each sat and wrote the cheeriest letters they could, decorated with drawings and full of jokes. "Poor Tib," both girls had agreed. They knew it was harder for her than it was

for them (and it was still pretty hard for them). They at least still had each other. But Tib would have to start all over in a new place, with new school and new friends.

"At least it sounds like she's doing okay," said Tacy, looking thoughtfully at her thick ham sandwich. "Maybe she's just trying to cheer us up and put on a brave face, but I think if she wasn't happy, we'd know. There'd be something she'd blurt out."

"Yes, she would," agreed Betsy. "That's why we always say, 'Just like Tib.'"

Tacy jumped up. "The cocoa!" The air was starting to smell chocolatey, and they should have stirred it a few times, but luckily the fire was pretty small and the cocoa hadn't started burning the bottom of the pail. "Whew! Are you ready for some? Pass me the cups."

Cocoa always tasted so wonderfully smoky when they made it over a fire, a different flavor from when they made it in a pot on the stove. They sipped cocoa and finished their sandwiches, pickles, eggs, cookies and Mrs. Kelly's unfrosted cake.

They sat a few minutes, lying back on the picnic cloth and staring up at the sky, giving themselves a few minutes to digest and enjoy this moment. Clouds floated across a bright blue sky. The long grass on the hill top waved with the slight breeze. They could feel the sun's beams gently beaming "Betsy," she said slowly, full of thought, "why do you think the dinosaurs came back?"

Betsy sat up, leaning back and bracing herself up with her arms. She looked at Tacy's freckled, questioning face. The question took Betsy aback.

"Well, they say--" she started.

"I know what they say," Tacy quickly interrupted. "But what do YOU think, Betsy? You think up lots of ideas on your own, and you read a lot, too. I'm not sure I believe what everyone else says. But maybe you have an idea."

"Hmmm," said Betsy, focusing her eyes on her own foot while she thought hard. Dinosaurs had reappeared on the earth five years ago, when Betsy and Tacy and Tib were seven years old. The experts had written newspaper article after newspaper article about the discoveries of the bodies of numerous dinosaurs being found in arctic caves. These dinosaurs had been frozen hard for millions of years, and scientists had wondered what would happen if the bodies were thawed very slowly in the perfect conditions. Was there any chance the dinosaurs could be brought back to life? The short answer was yes, and people had been thrilled to have these ancient and mysterious beasts become a part of life again in North America. And so it had been for the last several years, dinosaurs of all kinds walking the earth, a common sight in every town.

Betsy could still remember a time before dinosaurs. The world (or Deep Valley, for that was almost the whole of Betsy's world) had seemed much simpler, clearer, easier. They were living in the early 1900s, so they had lives and circumstances that fit with the 1900s. Their clothing, their houses, their transportation by horse and buggy (but even that had been getting shook up since the horseless carriages had been invented). It all matched up, it all made sense, it all fit together. They could have kept going on that path, but then it seemed like everything had forked off this main path onto a side road. Now there were dinosaurs of all sorts, shapes, kinds and sizes, and dinosaurs were a thing out of ancient history. Heck, Betsy thought to herself, way way before ancient history. It was like two different earthly time periods coming together. And it was wondrous -- oh yes, having dinosaurs on the earth again was very fascinating, but confusing, too. Dinosaurs used to be creatures that only lived in text books. Or in one's imagination. And now you could see them everywhere, and they'd been around for

several years now, so it had almost become commonplace, not something you thought twice about. Okay, maybe twice, but not three times!

"Why do I think dinosaurs have come back?" Betsy repeated. It flattered her that Tacy thought she might have the answer. Of course, Tacy was her biggest cheerleader and believed in Betsy and her talents so fiercely. And Betsy did have a lot of ideas and did spend a lot of time thinking and figuring things out on her own, too. Thinking for herself. And reading a lot, yes. Betsy also had a very active imagination, and her imagination could come up with a lot of creative stuff. So sure, why not? Why not Betsy to have an answer to the question, "Why do you think the dinosaurs have come back?"

Betsy sighed, and tried to put her thoughts into words. "I think they've come back to teach us something. Not the dinosaurs themselves – they don't seem smart enough for that. But I think there's something we are supposed to learn from them being here. It seems like it must mean something. Dinosaurs coming back is pretty big. It's like history looping around on itself. If I was writing a story about it, it would have some big meaning, even if it's mysterious."

"That makes sense!" said Tacy, sitting up abruptly. "I wonder what the meaning is, and who wants us to know it? It really is mysterious."

"And dramatic, too. Maybe someday we'll find out."

"We as in you and me, or we as in all people?" asked Tacy.

"Well, why don't we say we as in you and me? Gosh, why not? We're as smart as anyone," said Betsy.

"We sure are," said Tacy. They smiled at each other. Of course, they both knew there were probably other people, grownups who studied at Cambridge or Harvard, who had PhDs and all that, who were probably smarter than them. Maybe. But it wasn't a

given. They knew that they were also pretty smart, not to mention clever, quick thinking and most of all creative. Creative was almost more important than smart.

Speaking of smart and creative, it was time to get moving. Both girls jumped up, gathered up the picnic cloth, stuffed it into their basket, made double sure the fire was all put out safely, and picked up their dull silver cocoa pail. Now it was time to find the microceratops.

The microceratops was a small dinosaur, no more than 2 feet in length. It stood on its hind legs, had shorter arms that leaned forward, a longish tail and a bird-like head with a ceratops crown on the top of its head. It was greenish in color, and was an herbivore, so they wouldn't have to worry about making a muzzle for it, or afraid that it would nibble off their fingers. Miss Sparrow, the cheerful young librarian at the Carnegie Library was quickly becoming a friend to Betsy, who visited the library regularly. Miss Sparrow had shown Betsy the pictures of the microceratops in one of the many big books of dinosaurs on the library shelves. This wasn't even in the children's section. Betsy loved the children's section, but it was even more exciting to look at books in the adult section. She felt so grown up and respectable when she did that. At first she thought it might be against the rules, like she shouldn't be over in the adult section, but she soon learned that she could go anywhere in the library and that no one minded. Miss Sparrow smiled at her whenever she did it.

Betsy loved the library, and it still seemed like a miracle place to her. The Carnegie Library had just opened in downtown Deep Valley last year. It was such an amazing and important place for Betsy. When her parents had talked to her about her wish to be a writer, they had stressed the importance of reading a lot of good books. They had come up with a wonderful plan -- after the brand-new library opened, Betsy was to spend

regular Saturdays there, reading, acquainting herself with literature, and bringing home more books to read. The library seemed like a magical, miracle place to her; it was a whole building full of books of all kinds, on almost any topic, and the books were free for patrons to read or borrow... anything! How could something so wonderful be free?

So Betsy had studied up on the microceratops last Saturday, and she'd recalled seeing these cute little dinosaurs sometimes roaming wild up on the far side of the Big Hill. She and Tacy and Tib had chased them sometimes, for fun. And now she realized that they were maybe almost like a little dog. It would be fun to have one to play with, to train and tame, and maybe take around on a leash.

Betsy and Tacy decided to stash their picnic supplies behind a bush, and just fill the pockets of their dresses with spinach. "I never thought I'd ever be putting spinach in my pockets," Tacy laughed, pointing out the way their pockets bulged with the soft fluff of green leaves. "Now, how do we catch a microceratops?"

The truth was, Betsy really had no clue. She had tried to research that at the library, and hadn't found anything. There was information about the little dinosaur and what dinosaur family they came from and their behavior and such, but nothing about how to catch one or tame one. Betsy was just assuming they were going to figure it out as they went.

"Well, I'm not exactly sure," Betsy admitted, not wanting to make herself out to be some expert. "But I'm supposing it might be like catching a dog. Or a chicken. Remember when we did that, up on this very hill, back when we were 5 years old?"

Tacy nodded. They had indeed caught a chicken, or a rooster rather, by pretending to scatter feed on the ground and calling "here, chickabiddy" over and over again Tacy had bravely swooped down on the rooster and plopped it into a box. She wasn't so sure

she would want to do this with a dinosaur, no matter how cute it was. "We don't have a box or anything."

"I do have this," said Betsy, tugging under her dress to pull out a medium thick length of rope she'd been wearing underneath in belt form. "We could tie it around its neck once we catch it, not too tight of course, and use it as a leash to lead it home."

"Sounds good to me," said Tacy.

"So, let's go on a dinosaur treasure hunt," said Betsy.

Wondering what noise or sound they could make to attract a little dinosaur, they started walking around and trying out some sounds until they happened on one they liked. They clicked their tongues against the roof of their mouths, fast in a one-two-three-four-five rhythm, a noise that had seemed to work with cats and a dog or two that they'd known. They went around clicking, sometimes interspersing it with a high-voiced call of "hey-ya."

They approached the side of the Big Hill that looked down on Little Syria, where they'd once visited their friend Naifi, who was a real Syrian emeera. "We haven't seen her in a long time," Tacy said, looking down. "I wonder how she's doing?"

"Yes, I wonder too. Maybe we'll have to go over and visit her again sometime," said Betsy. Then she pointed down to a large wooded lot that had a brachiosaurus feeding on the leafy treetops. "Look at the size of that thing!" she cried. They had certainly gotten used to having dinosaurs living amongst them by now, but certain dinosaurs were so impressive that seeing them did take your breath away. This massive, towering gray dinosaur was over 75 feet long, like a train but much taller. It was distinctive because its front legs were longer than its back legs. And it had such a long neck it could easily eat the topmost leaves on any tree.

"It has such a funny name, 'brachiosaurus,'" remarked Tacy. "But then they all have strange long names, don't they?"

"That's right," said Betsy. "They're fun to say, though. Not fun to spell."

"I'm glad Miss Wood hasn't made us do a dinosaur spelling test," said Tacy. "That would be hard!"

"I wonder how that huge creature doesn't just tear down the whole town. I mean, it could just stomp its way through Little Syria right now and crush every house, or smash them just by swinging its tail. I know Papa said they have some special medicine called a vaccination that they give to dinosaurs to make them calm and careful around humans. It just doesn't make sense to me."

Tacy shrugged, and then they both turned and walked around clicking and calling high-pitched "hey- yas," looking down the hill slope and into the ravine. They went back through the Secret Lane and remembered a field where the Eckstroms pastured their cow. It was a pretty big field, heavy with grass. Maybe there'd be some dinosaurs there.

When they reached the pasture, they were delighted to see an eclectic herd of dinosaurs grazing, as if assembled by a prehistoric shepherd of some kind. There were some larger dinosaurs, a stegosaurus and a triceratops, and troodontids and placerias running around. Then Betsy saw them, just like their picture in the book at the library -- a group of microceratops, some standing still and grazing, a few others running around chasing each other. Betsy sucked her breath in and pointed them out to Tacy. "There they are!" Tacy grabbed her hand and squeezed excitedly.

Now there was the question of how to catch the little creature. It was one thing to have a fantasy in your mind about doing it, and quite another thing to go into a field full of dinosaurs and really try to catch one with your bare hands. Surely all the dinosaurs

were all vaccinated so they wouldn't stampede or attack them. But that didn't mean it would be an easy task.

Tacy gave Betsy a questioning look, silently asking "now what?" but Betsy just chewed her lip. They stood watching, thinking. One of them would say excitedly, "Maybe--" and then stop and say, "Nah." Then the other would do the same. They were trying out ideas in their mind, and then seeing how the plans wouldn't work. Then suddenly Tacy spoke up, slowly.

"What if we take the spinach and drop it on the ground, piece by piece, one at a time, like Hansel and Gretel. We could maybe wave it at them first, to get their attention, then see who comes, and drop spinach as we walk away so that we'll get followed, and then, once they're away from the field and eating spinach, we'll be able to catch our microceratops with the rope. What do you think?"

Betsy hugged her friend. "I think you're brilliant! What a great idea -- I always liked Hansel and Gretel. Maybe it's also like the Pied Piper; we could even sing a little as we go. That might get one to follow us too! How about -- " she cleared her throat and sung a little to herself first. Then she sang out loud, to the tune of "London Bridge Is Falling Down," but the words were, "A dinosaur will be our pet, be our pet, be our pet. A dinosaur will be our pet, eating spinach."

Tacy laughed. "I like it!" And then they both took some spinach out of their pockets, waved their green-filled hands at the dinosaurs and then began to sing their song, turning away and dropping spinach intermittently on the ground as they went. "Act as if it's natural. Don't look back, just keep singing and dropping," Betsy muttered to Tacy under her breath between verses.

So they went along, continuing to sing and drop spinach, and after a few minutes, Betsy nodded to Tacy and they both turned to look. They'd heard some movement and munching noises behind them, so they figured a microceratops or maybe two might be following them. But their mouths dropped open when they turned to see what the situation was. All the dinosaurs in the field were now following them! They were trying to grab up whatever spinach leaves they found, peacefully following and not fighting over the leaves. They were now the Pied Pipers of dinosaurs!

They walked slower, continuing to be calm, meanwhile giving each other looks of shock. "O-kayyyy," said Tacy. "Now what do we do?"

"Good question," said Betsy. "Let's think. The Pied Piper led them all into the river. Of course we're not going to do that. We just want one little dinosaur, we don't want to kill off any of them."

"That's for sure," agreed Tacy. "We could lead them downtown and have a dinosaur parade." Tacy gave Betsy an impish smile.

"Oh, wouldn't that get us some looks! We could just start walking in a circle, and then we could make a break for it and scoop up the microceratops. Maybe they would just keep going after we left, until one of them broke it up."

"Or maybe they'd just keep going in circles forever," said Tacy.

"Maybe the next time we'd come up to the Big Hill, they'd still be walking in circles." Betsy drew a large circle with her hand.

"I do like that. We should give it a try. Now how should we do it?"

The two girls tilted their heads close together, as if the dinosaurs might hear what they were saying and decide to foil their plan. They talked in low voices, and after a few back-and-forths, they decided that Tacy would get the dinosaurs going in a circle, and

then once they were established, Betsy would swoop in and grab one of the little guys, and Tacy would have the rope handy to put around his neck. Then they would make a quick dash away, hoping the dinosaurs wouldn't notice.

Tacy led the way, gradually, bit by bit, starting to make her walking curve, so that eventually she was following the last dinosaur, a big triceratops. It was a pretty large circle, and quite a sight to see, actually. Just behind them was one of the little microceratops, and Betsy was keeping her eye on him. Her heart was thumping in her chest, at the idea of the next stage of the plan, where she'd have to grab the little thing. Would it squirm and try and get away? Would it be slimy? Would it bite her? She knew that they were herbivores, so it wouldn't want to eat her, but it still might bite her or claw her. It was just unknown, so it was both exciting and scary. She took a few deep breaths and then nodded to Tacy. They both quickly and deftly stepped out of the circle, and the little dinosaur behind them stopped, looked up at them puzzled and then followed to get behind them, where they'd stepped out of the circle. The other dinosaurs made gruffing, surprised noises and then followed the new path too. Betsy and Tacy kept trying to step away, but the circle was now broken and the dinosaurs swerved to follow them, wherever they now moved to. Betsy and Tacy exchanged alarmed looks, and then Betsy shouted, "Just run!"

So they started running around like crazy, no more patterns just running in random directions to try to shake off their dinosaur parade. This got the dinosaurs excited too, or agitated, and they started to run all over too, the larger dinosaurs making the ground shake at their pounding. It was getting chaotic now, and Betsy hoped nobody would get hurt.

"We should get out of here!" shouted Tacy, who now had a fast little dinosaur following her.

"Yes!" Betsy called back, remembering that she needed to try and get one of the microceratops. She turned to look while still running, and one of them ran right in front of her. Betsy picked up her pace and ran after it. This one was pretty fast, so Betsy went turbo speed, running her fastest, and then the little guy paused because a stegosaurus had stepped in front of it. Betsy quickly came right upon him and reached out her arms. Before he knew what hit him, she'd scooped him up, a smooth leathery bony weight in her arms, about 20 lbs. The creature seemed startled, and his instinct seemed to be to freeze in place, so she didn't have to contend with him trying to squirm away. "Tacy!" shouted Betsy. "I've got him! Bring the rope!"

Tacy looked around and avoided being run down by another medium sized dinosaur. "Can you come over here?" she shouted at Betsy. Tacy was more on the outside of the chaotic swarm of galloping dinosaurs, and Betsy was still squarely in the middle of the frenzy.

"I'll try!" Betsy hugged the microceratops close and instead of running, now, walked carefully through the swarm, waiting for dinosaurs to pass, dodging here and there. It wasn't too bad, but a little nerve- racking, trying not to get run over or to have something bump into her and knock the little dinosaur from her grip.

At last, she was over by Tacy, who had moved behind a clump of bushes a little ways away from the dinosaurs. Betsy tucked in beside her, and Tacy's eyes were bright with excitement. "I can't believe you actually caught him," she said. "Here, let me see if I can make the rope work."

Betsy knelt down on the ground and Tacy joined her. Betsy set the dinosaur on the ground while still keeping her arms wrapped around him, and then Tacy brought for the rope and placed the loop over the dinosaur's neck. "It's too loose. Wait a minute and I'll fix it." Tacy fiddled with the rope.

Meanwhile, Betsy held the dinosaur, who was quiet and turning his head to look up at her with big lizard eyes. In this quiet moment, she could feel his heart beating beneath her hands. "I think he's pretty scared," said Betsy.

"Poor little guy," said Tacy, working her fingers around the knot. She got it untied and then quickly tied a new knot, her fingers working fast. She looped it around the microceratops' head, and then pulled it to make it more snug. She grabbed the rope to see how it would work for a leash while Betsy kept a firm grip on the dinosaur, but it was obvious from her first little tug on the leash that it wasn't going to work. The dinosaur's head was so small that the loop would easily slip off its neck and over its head, without much effort on his part. "Gosh," said Tacy. "I don't think it's going to work." She looked at Betsy, whose brows were furrowed. Again, they were back to rethinking their plan.

She stood up, picking up the dinosaur to hold him in her arms, as she might a small dog or a large baby. "Well, I think I can carry him," she told Tacy.

"And I can hold him when your arms get tired," offered Tacy. "We'll take turns."

Betsy nodded. "I think that will work. It's really our only choice at this point. We'll give it a try."

So they walked down the hill, carefully so that they wouldn't trip or fall while carrying the dinosaur, and the dinosaur blinked and looked around, contemplating what was going on as if from a distance. Betsy carried him, then after a while, passed him to Tacy, who although thinner was just as strong as Betsy. She had carried babies around a

lot because of her large family, and helped her mother as needed. Tacy was no frail flower.

Soon they neared Hill Street and their houses, the yellow cottage and the white house, facing each other across the street. Betsy's footsteps slowed, and Tacy followed suit. The reality of having to face her mother and present the dinosaur to her and ask if she could keep it as a pet was all of a sudden daunting. How could she make a good case to her mother? How could she convince her that this would be a good, thing, maybe a learning opportunity? Betsy wasn't sure.

"I'm not sure what to say to Mama," Betsy confessed to Tacy.

"You could say you'll never ask for anything again. That might work," suggested Tacy.

"Problem is, I've used that before. And after a few times, it just doesn't work anymore... because obviously I'm still asking." Betsy sighed.

"I know what you mean," said Tacy. "This is a pretty big thing, asking for a pet. I can't think of anything I'd say either."

"Well, maybe I'll be inspired when I talk to her. I hope, I hope, I hope," she muttered.

They decided that Tacy would hold the dinosaur while Betsy asked her mother to come outside. Betsy passed the blinking and quiet little dinosaur over to Tacy, who hugged it to her like it was the cutest little kitten, rather than a rough brown bumpy-skinned lizard. Betsy brushed herself off and walked up the steps, opening the front door calmly and giving Tacy a look like "well, here goes nothing."

Betsy walked through the little yellow cottage, through the front parlor, the back parlor, and into the kitchen. There her mother, Mrs. Ray, was kneading a big mound of dough. "Hi Mama," said Betsy casually. "Making bread today?"

Mrs. Ray pushed and pulled on the soft pillow of dough with her strong forceful arms. She wore a pretty floral house dress and had a big scarf tied around her pretty red hair. She often wore this kind of outfit when she was cooking or housecleaning, to keep her hair out of the way and free from dust or flour. "Yes, today is the day. What have you been up to, Betsy? Did you and Tacy have a nice picnic on the Hill today?"

"Very nice," said Betsy. "It was great up there today. Um, can I interrupt you for a moment, Mama, and have you come outside to see something? I know you're busy, but this would be just for a moment?" She looked at her mother with hopeful eyes.

Mrs. Ray gave a few more shoves on the bread dough, and then plopped it into the large crockery bowl she used for making bread. "I just finished kneading, so this is a good time. Just let me wash my hands first."

Betsy watched while her mother worked the pump in the sink and got some water flowing. She scrubbed dried bits of dough off her hands with a little brush. Then she dried her hands off on the towel hanging by the sink, and turned to Betsy. "Okay, then. You have something to show me?" she asked Betsy.

"Yes, out front," said Betsy, leading the way back through the kitchen, back parlor and front parlor to the front door.

Out front, Betsy saw that Tacy was standing there calmly with the little dinosaur, but now there was something she hadn't expected. Kids from the neighborhood had gathered around, chattering about the dinosaur, looking at it, a few brave ones petting

it. "What are you going to do with it," one little girl asked Tacy. Tacy just shrugged. She'd just seen that Betsy had come out with her mother.

Mrs. Ray flew down the steps, her face full of surprise. "Tacy, what have you got there? A dinosaur? Are you sure it's safe?" Her voice was sharp, full of concern.

"I'm okay, Mrs. Ray. This dinosaur is safe. It's a microceratops, and it only eats plants. Isn't it cute?" Tacy gently bounced him up and down in her arms, as if she were comforting a baby.

"Well, I'm not sure I'd say cute, but he's not too bad as far as dinosaurs go." Mrs. Ray bent down to look at the dinosaur face to face. She reached out a tentative hand to touch its back. "But what are you going to do with him, Tacy? That's what I'm really wondering about."

Betsy stepped up then. "Mama, it's not really Tacy's dinosaur," she explained. "Tacy helped me to catch him, but..." she paused, "he's really mine. I wanted him for a pet. He seems like such a nice little dinosaur, doesn't he, Mama? I've so been wanting a pet, and he seems like he'd make a good one. Can we keep him, Mama?"

All the chattering, excited kids from the neighborhood had gone quiet, listening to this exchange with great interest. If Mrs. Ray said yes to a dinosaur as a pet, then maybe their mothers would too. It would set a precedent in the neighborhood. Suddenly all eyes were on Mrs. Ray, who looked at her little audience a little nervously. Betsy looked at her mother just as nervously. It was a moment of pressure building.

But Mrs. Ray was smart, and she could tell she was being set up, whether Betsy had intended it this way or not. With the deftness of a judge she made her decision. She pointed her nose upwards a little and looked a little stern. "You may keep the dinosaur-- what did you say it was, a microceratops? You may keep it here for the day, and then

when Papa comes home, we'll discuss it as a family. Now I'd better get back to the kitchen." She turned, climbed the steps and walked in the door.

Betsy and Tacy beamed at each other with a look of relief in their eyes. Her mother hadn't said "no" outright, which was a good first step. Talking to Mr. Ray would be the great hurdle to get over, but for now, they had a pet! And they had time to think of their next plan of attack.

Tacy passed the little dinosaur over to Betsy, and shook out her arms. The kids were back to chattering, and looking closely at the dinosaur, more petting too. The dinosaur seemed to like all the attention, or at least he didn't mind it. They decided to take him into the back yard, and to see what they'd do with him.

Betsy suddenly turned to Tacy. "Can you get more rope, Tacy? A longer piece than last time? Maybe really long? I have an idea of how we can make a new leash for him."

Tacy nodded and ran off to her own yard, to the buggy shed at the side of her house. Betsy walked around the back yard with the little dinosaur until she got back, talking to him and showing him the maple tree, the garden, the rose bushes. Tacy was breathless when she got back.

"Can you hold him again? I want to play with the rope a bit to see if this works." Tacy took back the dinosaur and sat with him on the grass. He was stretching out now and making little chirping- purring noises. Maybe he was getting used to all this new stuff now.

Betsy was tying the rope, turning it this way and that, making knots and then taking out the knots, concentrating hard on what she was trying to create. "I, think, I, have, it," she said slowly, pulling on the knots she'd made. She held it up to the dinosaur to make sure of how it would go, and then working with Tacy, she slipped it over his

head and gently pulled his little arms through the contraption. It seemed to fit just right. Betsy had made a little harness out of the rope, with a loop around his neck but also looping around his body and between his legs and up around his back. Now the leash was more secure, and if he couldn't figure out how to wiggle out of it, they'd be able to keep him on the leash and not risk him running away. "Let's try it out," said Betsy.

Tacy set the little dinosaur down on the ground, his back legs settled down gently onto the grass. She released the rest of his body and scooted back, and Betsy scooted back too, holding onto the other end of the rope. The little brown dinosaur blinked and looked over at them, cocking his head. Then he looked at the grass all around him and began to walk. He didn't try to get loose.

"Yay!" laughed Tacy. "It's working. You did it, Betsy!"

Betsy smiled, letting the dinosaur walk further with the rope.

With the long piece of rope, he could walk about 30 feet away from them, which they thought was nice, to give him a bit of freedom.

He stepped on the grass cautiously, looking around with wide open eyes. He kept looking back at them, and then taking a few steps forward.

"He needs a name. What do you want to call him, Betsy?" asked Tacy.

"I've been reading 'Les Misérables' at the library lately. I was thinking I like the name Hugo for this little guy, for Victor Hugo."

"Hugo," said Tacy, trying out the name. "I like it. It's a great dinosaur name."

"Let's try it out," said Betsy, then switched to a softer, higher-pitched tone of voice, like if you were calling a dog. "Hugo, Hugo, hey little guy, do you like your new name?"

The dinosaur threw a glance back at her and then kept going on his way. He'd reached the end of the rope now and started walking in a circular motion.

Tacy got up and started slowly and quietly creeping up on Hugo. She wiggled her fingers at him and talked softly. "Hugo... Hugo... here boy, look here." Tacy was being so soft and gentle, the dinosaur actually stopped and looked at her, watched her coming, and poked his nose forward toward her wiggling fingers. Tacy touched him now, stroking the top of his head. "Hugo, that's you. Hugo, Hugo," she kept repeating. He seemed to be enjoying getting scratched.

"Tacy, you are so good with animals and babies," said Betsy, smiling proudly over at her friend, who looked like she could have had a dinosaur eating out of her hand, even if it was just a little dinosaur.

"I think he just needed to hear his name, up close. Maybe he'll start to understand a little bit," said Tacy.

They spent the afternoon playing with Hugo and keeping him happy. They allowed him to walk in the garden to see what kinds of foods he liked besides spinach. He liked green beans and zucchini, though he seemed to be interested in eating the plants, leaves and vines just as much as the vegetables. He liked the chard and kale as well. Now they had more of an idea of what they'd need to do to feed a dinosaur.

They discussed what Betsy could say to her father when he came home. They knew this was a classic set up-- mother says "maybe," and then father says, "no." They didn't know how it would work out.

Hugo curled up in a sunny patch on the ground at one point and took a nap. Tacy wondered if any of their current doll clothing would fit him, but Betsy didn't think so. He certainly wasn't big, but he had a different shape than their old dolls, who were more vertical while Hugo's body sprawled in a more horizontal line. As they were discussing

outfits they could make for him, Tacy piped up. "Hey, how do we know he's a boy dinosaur, anyway? He might be a girl."

Betsy and Tacy looked over at the sleeping curled up dinosaur; they had no idea how to tell if it was a boy or girl dinosaur, since dinosaurs didn't seem to have any parts down there that showed. They looked at each other and shrugged. "Beats me," said Betsy. "I just have a feeling Hugo is a boy, you know what I mean? And that's good enough for me."

"Yeah, he feels like a boy to me, too," said Tacy, nodding her head. "And really, what difference does it make, anyway? It's not like he can tell us or feel offended by us calling him a boy if he's really a girl. It's not like we really need to know."

"Yes, that's true," said Betsy. "To us, he's a boy."

They'd been tucked back in Betsy's backyard for most of the afternoon, trying to keep Hugo calm and quiet, away from the neighborhood kids or adults. Now they could tell by the height of the sun that Mr. Ray would soon be home, and before long they heard the familiar clopping of Old Mag's hooves and the crunch of the wheels of the carriage as Mr. Ray came home. Betsy and Tacy hopped up, both of them agitated, their hearts pumping hard. Tacy put a hand on Betsy's shoulder, give a reassuring squeeze. "It's going to be okay," she whispered. "Look at him. How can anyone resist?"

Hugo was up and walking around now. Betsy gave the leash rope a little shake, and tried to gently pull Hugo to go towards the front yard. She shortened the rope to give him less lead, winding the rope around her hand several times.

"Come on, Hugo," said Tacy in a sing song voice, waving her hand in front of his face and he took a few steps toward her, so she walked backwards to get him to walk forward, wiggling her fingers in front of him like a shiny toy trinket.

Slowly they got Hugo to walk to the front yard. Papa had already gone inside, so now Betsy handed the leash to Tacy, who was jiggling it and trying to keep the little dinosaur entertained and happy. Betsy walked solemnly up the steps. Papa was in the kitchen talking to Mama. They both looked over at her when she walked in, exchanging a look between them, and Betsy knew that her father at least knew she wanted to talk to him, to ask him something. She took a deep, raggedy breath. "Papa, is this an okay time for me to talk to you about something?"

Mr. Ray was of medium build, slightly stocky, sturdy, with brown hair and kind, intelligent eyes. He owned Ray's Shoe Store and sold shoes downtown. He could be serious, and was often cheerful, full of fun, loved to joke. Betsy didn't know which side of her father a little dinosaur named Hugo would bring out.

"It's as good a time as any, I suppose," he said with a little grin. "What have you got for me, Betsy?"

"Can you come outside with me? It would be easier if I showed you."

Papa gave a little half-smile and nodded. Betsy swallowed hard and led the way to the front door, then outside and down the steps. It was starting to feel like déjà vu from talking to Mama about it earlier. But now the pressure was greater.

Tacy was looking adorable in the front yard, holding Hugo and bouncing him like a baby, humming to keep him happy, while little children from the neighborhood circled around her, fascinated. They all made quite a picture.

Betsy went and stood right next to Tacy, looking up at her father, who was taking his time walking down the steps. "Well, what have we here," he asked, coming to stand on the bottom step.

"Hello, Mr. Ray," said Tacy, ever polite.

"Hello, Tacy. It looks like you have an armful," said Mr. Ray, giving her a little half- smile.

"I do," she told him. "It's a microceratops."

"Really... and what are you going to do with it, Tacy?"

Tacy nodded to Betsy, who was gearing herself up for the discussion to come.

"He's actually mine, Papa. Tacy helped me to catch him this afternoon, because I really wanted to see about having a dinosaur as a pet, and I'd learned about microceratops at the library last Saturday, and they seemed like they'd make good pets. So we found dinosaurs up on the Big Hill and we found this little guy. His name is Hugo, after Victor Hugo. Isn't he a cute dinosaur, Papa?" Betsy talked fast, almost without taking a breath.

She smiled, and Mr. Ray stepped down and walked closer to Tacy and the dinosaur. He reached out a finger to stroke Hugo's back, while Hugo looked up at him with wide dinosaur eyes. "You know, I still have a hard time getting used to dinosaurs being around. This has been quite an interesting and strange past few years. It still just seems strange to me, but fascinating at the same time. It's like living with history-- prehistoric history. For an old guy like me, that's quite a shock." He gave a little chuckle, and murmured "Hugo" quietly. "It's a good name for him."

Betsy took this as a hopeful sign. He hadn't said "no" right away. Any delay in hearing "no" was a good thing.

"He's been really good so far, Papa," said Betsy. "We've had him in the back yard, and he's been quiet and curious, looking around. And do you see the harness I made for him? That seems to be working to keep him on our leash."

"I see. Very good," he said, examining the harness. "I can see you've put a lot of thought into this."

This was encouraging. Betsy gulped. It was like a little dance, trying to steer the discussion and convince her father and get him to see her point of view. Was now the right time to ask directly? She wasn't sure. She decided to keep on trying to be indirect for a little while more.

"I've really been wanting a pet for a long time, Papa. And I think he would be a good one. They're small dinosaurs, so he won't be growing, and he doesn't seem like he'll be wild or bite. He's an herbivore, so he eats plants, and we've already seen some kinds of plants he likes from our garden. And he eats leaves and grass too, so he won't even cost us any money for food. I think Hugo would make a great pet," Betsy took a deep breath and closed her eyes. "What do you think Papa? Can I keep him? Can Hugo be my pet dinosaur?"

Mr. Ray sighed, and crossed his arms in front of him, looking down as if concentrating while he paced back and forth a little while. He was thinking, and Betsy knew that now it was best to let him think and to wait quietly and patiently. She and Tacy exchanged anxious glances, and Betsy went over to relieve Tacy's arms-- she'd been holding Hugo for quite a while now. Tacy shook out her arms, and Betsy gave her a grateful look. Tacy smiled in response.

Mr. Ray kept walking, cupping his chin now in the thumb and forefinger of his right hand. It looked like thoughts must be whirring behind his forehead in his mind. It was nerve racking, but it was also nice to know that her father put thought into things. He didn't just say the first thing that came to mind. He was taking her request seriously.

At last Mr. Ray cleared his throat. "I've been thinking hard about what you asked, Betsy. You know, I don't take your request for a pet lightly. I know you've been wanting one, and having a pet is serious business-- when you take a pet, you are essentially agreeing to take care of another living creature. They depend on you to keep them alive and happy, so it's a pretty big responsibility. In this case, you are taking a wild animal of a species that is old but new to us. There are a lot of unknowns, here, and that doesn't mean that trying to keep a dinosaur as a pet wouldn't be a good idea. You're already 12 years old, Betsy, old enough to take care of a pet, and old enough to make some decisions on your own. So I'm not going to say yes or no to this one. I'm going to say, this is your decision to make. You can weigh the pros and cons. I trust you to make a decision that will be good for you-- and Tacy, since it's obvious she'll share in the duties-- and the microceratops. Whatever you decide, I hope it will be to the benefit of both you two, and little Hugo here. He deserves to be happy too. So, I'll leave you to your decision." Mr. Ray smiled at both of them, then patted Hugo on his head, and went back into the house. "I think your mother will have dinner ready soon."

"Thank you, Papa!" said Betsy, her face full of excitement. After the door closed behind him, Betsy and Tacy jumped together, deliriously happy that he hadn't said no. "Yay, we did it! We have a pet!" the two girls shouted in hushed voices as they jumped. They were so happy that their plans were working out.

Mama was calling her to supper now, and Tacy was getting called to dinner by her little brother Paul now. The girls quickly devised a plan, their first attempt at leaving their pet Hugo alone for a while. "We'll see how he does," said Betsy, as she knotted the rope very well to a smaller tree in their front yard. They put Hugo down. At first he seemed all right, just standing there and rubbing his beak-like snout against the tree

trunk. "Be good, Hugo, and I'll be back soon," said Betsy. Then both she and Tacy ran into their respective houses.

Supper at Betsy's house was fried potatoes and ham, with some sautéed spinach (which made Betsy think of Hugo, who of course, loved spinach). Julia and Margaret had just briefly glimpsed the little dinosaur, and now he was the talk of the table. Betsy was right in the middle of a bite of potatoes when she heard a howl coming from the front yard. It was moaning, like a sick crow might make, mixed with the sound of a lonely hound.

"May I be excused?" asked Betsy, wiping her mouth on her napkin. She looked up at her mother, who told her the dinosaur would have to wait. "You've barely eaten anything, Betsy. Pets sometimes cry or call out. He'll be okay. Just eat."

Betsy got a worried look in her eyes, but she just started to eat faster. She did enjoy Mama's potatoes, liking the oniony-fried taste, and having some of the potatoes be soft and creamy while others had a crunchiness to them, brown and crisp. The house smelled slightly of cooking oil, but it was a warm and cozy smell. The ham was salty with a tiny hint of sweetness to it.

Betsy ate the last mouthful on her plate, and then asked again if she could be excused. When her mother said it would be okay, she jumped up and grabbed her plate and cup and fork and knife and napkin, bringing them to the kitchen sink. Julia and Margaret were eating faster now, too. "We'll come out and play with Hugo a little, too, Betsy," said Julia. "Mama, can we do the dishes just a little bit later?"

Mrs. Ray said that would be fine, that they could just do the dishes sometime before bedtime. Then all three girls were done and running down the front steps.

Hugo was a sight, a sad little story. He was walking around the tree and had wound himself up so the rope was very short now, and he was moaning sadly, a wild and lonely sound like wolves howling. "Oh Hugo," said Betsy, full of pity for her pet. "What's wrong. It's okay, here, let me untangle you." She scooped him up and then started to unwind him by walking in reverse direction around the tree. He kept moaning, but got quieter each time since now he was getting the attention and company he'd wanted.

Now Tacy ran over from her yard, and a group of kids emerged again, including Tacy's brother Paul and sister Katie, not to mention Julia and Margaret. Betsy let him down on the ground so he could walk, and Margaret and Paul tried to feed Hugo some grass and leaves. He wasn't interested in eating. He seemed to be getting agitated, maybe by all the kids surrounding him. Julia took a turn at picking him up, trying to calm him down.

Betsy frowned, but Julia just said, "You've got to understand that this is a lot for him. You have a great imagination, Betsy... just imagine that you're a little dinosaur, living out with other dinosaurs on the Big Hill, roaming free and just doing what dinosaurs out in the wild do. He's used to being free, with others of his kind. This is all so new to him. Of course, it's going to take some adjustment. Just be patient with the little guy."

"Ohhh," said Betsy, Julia's words of wisdom sinking in. She hadn't been thinking about it that way. But it made total sense, and Tacy the tender hearted frowned. "Poor Hugo. Are you lonely for your dinosaur family?" She stroked his bony and leathery head. He cooed at her.

But Betsy was determined to have a pet. She'd worked so hard for this one, and he was cute and small and it really seemed like it could work out well. She had visions of

her walking Hugo around on the rope like a dog. Maybe they could train him, or teach him to play kick ball, or he could learn his name and come when he was called.

Now it was getting to be time for bed. Betsy and Tacy talked over how they would get through the night. "This first night might be hard. I've heard of people who have a new kitten or puppy, and how they are sad and lonely at first, until they get used to their new place," said Tacy. "And if he can't be in the house with one of us, then it might be really hard for him."

Betsy frowned. This was all more complicated than she'd guessed it would be when she thought of catching a little dinosaur as a pet that morning. She thought the hard part would be catching the dinosaur, and convincing her parent to keep him, not taking care of him. "We can put him in the buggy shed," planned Betsy. "We can set up a nice bed for him there, and maybe sit in there with him a while."

So they found an old horse blanket and some leaves and set up a little pile in the buggy shed for Hugo. He seemed to like it, and even settled down to rest there while Betsy and Tacy sat talking quietly next to him. He even dozed off, so they very quietly, silently, crept out the door and closed it. "Whew! That went better than I thought," said Betsy.

They said goodnight, and then they each went off to their own houses. Betsy had a back window that looked out on the back yard and the buggy shed. She left her bedroom window open that night, just so she could hear if anything started going wrong.

And for the first part of the night, everything went fine. Betsy slept, and the dinosaur didn't make a peep, and then about three or four in the morning, she started to hear a mournful moaning sound. She first heard it in her dream and thought it was just a part of her dream about monkeys in the African jungle. But then she woke up fully and

could hear the sad cry coming from the back yard, yes, from the buggy shed. "Oh no!" she thought to herself.

She got her robe and slippers and decided to tiptoe through the house as quietly as possible-- she knew Mama and Papa wouldn't like her going outside in the middle of the night, but she felt like she had no choice. She didn't want Hugo to be so sad, and she certainly didn't want him to wake up her family or the neighbors.

She ended up spending the rest of the night in the buggy shed, so dark and quiet once she calmed the little dinosaur down. It was a little creepy to be sitting out there, alone. She held him and shushed him and eventually he fell asleep again, and she thought she might sleep too, but she stayed wide awake, thinking. She sneaked back into the house before her parents woke up, and was in the dining room for breakfast with her family, feeling pretty tired.

"How is it going with your new pet?" asked Papa as he buttered his toast.

"Oh, okay," said Betsy evasively, reaching for her glass of milk. "It's a lot of fun to have a dinosaur as a pet. But I've been thinking about what you said, Papa, about me making the decision. And I've been thinking about something Julia said, about using my imagination to think of how Hugo feels. I'm thinking Hugo might not be very happy being a pet. He's not really like a dog or cat, used to living with people. He's used to living with dinosaurs out in nature. I don't think he's really happy being put in a rope and sleeping in the buggy shed. So maybe, after Tacy and I have some fun playing with him today, we'll take him back up on the Big Hill. We'll let him go back with his dinosaur family. I want him to be happy."

Mr. Ray nodded, thinking, and then smiling at his daughter. "That's a very wise decision, Betsy, and very unselfish of you. I know you want a pet, but it's important to

think about other creatures too, and how they feel. I know it's hard to give him up. But I'm proud of you."

Betsy nodded. She did have mixed feelings about this, but it felt right. It was just fun having caught him and tried him out as a pet. And maybe they could go visit him up on the Big Hill other times, if he was staying there.

When Tacy came over after breakfast, she told Tacy her news, too. Tacy nodded solemnly, especially after Betsy told her about her night, about sitting in the buggy shed with Hugo and not getting much sleep. "That's hard," said Tacy. "I know you really wanted to keep him. But it won't work if you can't get any sleep, or if he's not happy. But he is so cute!"

Betsy agreed, and they decided that they would keep him for another day, play with him, walk him around on his leash, even see if they could dress him up in some little kid clothes if they could find them (maybe Mrs. Rivers would have some they could borrow. Betsy and Tacy's little brothers and sisters weren't that little anymore). They had a lot of fun with him. It was the perfect summer day to have a dinosaur as a pet. And for the most part, Hugo seemed happy, eating beans and spinach and broccoli out of the garden, napping in the sun. But then, before supper, Betsy called to her mother that she and Tacy were going up on the Big Hill. It was time to return Hugo to his natural habitat.

Hugo seemed extra excited as he started to climb the hill. He seemed to be recognizing the terrain, and Betsy and Tacy had a hard time keeping up with him, panting as he had them running to keep up with him as he pulled on the leash. They steered him through the Secret Lane, with its neat rows of trees, and then beyond to the large grassy area. There, where Betsy and Tacy had worked so hard to capture their little

pet, where they'd dropped spinach like Hansel and Gretel and had a whole diverse herd of dinosaurs following them, where they'd gotten the dinosaurs to follow them in a circle before they grabbed Hugo and ran for it-- that's where they untied the rope harness and let him go. He seemed so agitated as they untied him, squirming and making little happy chirruping noises. There were other dinosaurs on the hilly pasture, some the same as they'd seen the day before, and a few different ones too. They were all happily munching tall grass and nibbling on tree leaves here and there. Tacy held Hugo firmly and Betsy untied the knots. There were three big ones, and it took some pushing and pulling and picking apart with her fingers, but at last the final knot came loose, Betsy pulled the rope away and gave Hugo a hug. Tacy kissed him on his head. And then she knelt down and let him go. He stood blinking a minute, looked back at them, and both girls were sure that his last chirrups and squawks were his way of saying "thanks!" and "good bye" to them. Then he was off at a run, running all over, chasing his microceratops siblings, leaping up on a rock, eating a big mouthful of grass, squawking at other dinosaurs, basically being the wild creature he was.

Betsy sighed heavily. "I'm going to miss him."

Tacy patted her arm. "I think you did the right thing. Look at how happy he is."

Betsy and Tacy stood arm and arm for a long while more, watching their pet. It seemed longer than 1 day had passed. It seemed like at least a week. No matter what, though, it had been a good adventure.

Chapter 2: The Next Big Thing in Town

Of course, Betsy and Tacy wrote full descriptions of their adventures with their dinosaur pet in thick letters addressed to Tib in Milwaukee. She was fascinated, and wrote them back about the dinosaurs in Milwaukee, and when school started, what her new school was like. Writing letters and receiving letters was fun, but Betsy and Tacy would have rather had no letters if they could have Tib back in Deep Valley with them.

One day in the Fall, after school had started and was no longer new and exciting as it seemed for the first few weeks, the town was full of talk of a traveling showman coming to Deep Valley. Word spread of his arrival two weeks before he showed up.

He was Mr. Horace B. Lester. He had two large white fancy horses trimmed in red and black pulling a long flat wagon with a wide and tall train-like car on the back. It was a huge metal trailer painted with scary toothy dinosaurs on the outside, and flashy colorful words like "amazing" and "fierce" and "terrible" all over the trailer. The word spread around town, as quick as wildfire, that Mr. Horace B. Lester had a Tyrannosaurus rex inside, one of the most dangerous predators of all time, that he brought from town to town to show people, of course charging admission and selling tickets.

Betsy remembered when the news first hit the school. Winona Root, who was the daughter of the Deep Valley Sun's editor, was the first one to share the news. Her eyes were full of sparkle, and her nose was just a little bit in the air, as she gathered a little group around her before their 6th grade teacher, Miss Wood, called the class to order for the morning. "Have you heard? Have you heard?" Winona asked, which of course drew

people to her. No one had heard -- her father ran the newspaper, so Winona usually heard all the news first, but she liked to say it because it made her sound important.

Betsy and Tacy were in the group crowding around Winona, excited to hear the news. "What is it, Winona?" Tacy asked.

The group was buzzing, but everyone quieted down when Winona raised her hand. "Here's the latest, kids. Guess what's coming to Deep Valley? A Tyrannosaurus rex! There's a traveling showman coming to town in the next week or two, and he's been traveling from town to town bringing this dinosaur so people can see it for themselves. You know what a T. rex is, don't you? Only the most fierce, dangerous dinosaur in the world!" Winona could have been a traveling showman herself, the way she announced things so dramatically, with her voice raising and lilting in a sing-song way.

Oohs and ahhs swept through the crowd of kids, agitated murmurings. "A real LIVE Tyrannosaurus rex?" asked Herbert Humphreys. "Or just an old dead one, or a skeleton or something?"

"Oh, it's real and alive, all right. Papa showed me a sketch from a newspaper in Iowa- - an artist who makes sketches so lifelike you'd almost swear it was a photograph. I wanted to give a little scream just looking at it. It looks like a monster! It's big and has mean eyes and about a million sharp teeth in a huge mouth. It looks crazy. Like this," said Winona, scrunching up her arms to make them look little, opening her eyes real wide to look crazy and bulging, and opening her mouth as big as she could, baring her teeth and snapping them at those closest to her.

Tacy shuddered. "I'm not sure I want to see it. It would give me nightmares."

"I wouldn't miss it," said Tom Slade, an old friend of Betsy and Tacy's from when they were little kids. Betsy's mom and Tom's mom were friends, so they had spent a lot

of time together over the years, especially at family gatherings. "You can't miss out on seeing a real live T. rex dinosaur! It's history. Think of all the people in history who never got to see one. It would be great!"

Herbert Humphreys and Tom started mimicking Winona's impression of a T. rex, roaring and looking crazy and fierce. Some of the other girls played along and looked overly scared, screaming and running away from the boys, who began to chase them.

"Children!" called Miss Wood. "Calm down. We have one minute until class begins. Don't get all wild right now. Please!"

Betsy sidled up next to Tacy, who still looked a bit pale and frightened at the news. "Do you want to see it, Betsy?" she asked.

"Well, I know I'll be scared, but I do want to see it. I just can't imagine what one is really like. I'd want to see it for myself. But I'd want to see it from a safe distance." Betsy shivered a little at the idea.

Winona looked at Betsy and Tacy, her eyes snapping and bright. She spoke sideways to them, behind her hand, whispering loudly, "You know, I'll probably be able to get comps to see the T. rex. Papa always seems to get some free tickets. If I do, you know you'll be top of my list." She nodded at them, showing she was doing them a favor.

Of course, they appreciated this new attitude of Winona's towards them. Ever since they'd wheedled her into taking them to see "Uncle Tom's Cabin" at the Opera House, she'd been much closer to the girls. Betsy suspected that when Tib left to move to Milwaukee, Winona had seen herself as stepping into Tib's spot in the immortal trio. And Winona did often join Betsy and Tacy, but she really wasn't a threesome kind of girl. She didn't mesh in quite that togetherness kind of way, in the closeness Betsy, Tacy and Tib had shared. Winona liked to have her independence too much, her own ego.

And that was fine; she was still a great friend. She just wasn't someone that Betsy and Tacy shared all their close feelings and thoughts and dreams and wishes and secrets with.

"Thanks, Winona!" said Betsy enthusiastically. Tacy gave her a weak smile and nodded, not very convincingly.

Winona smacked her lightly on the arm. "Oh Tacy, don't be afraid. It will be perfectly safe. You wouldn't want to miss out on the chance to see an amazing dinosaur like this, would you? Something that people in the past have just dreamed about. We get to see it! That's so fantastic!"

Tacy shut her eyes tight, as if trying to convince herself. "Okay, I'll try to be brave..."

And now Miss Wood was finally calling the classroom to order. It was time for them all to sit in their seats and begin the morning with Math. Betsy was glad she'd finished her homework last night, and remembered to bring the work in with her this morning. Sometimes it was hard to remember everything.

By the time they got out of school in the afternoon, the whole town was buzzing with the news. Over dinner, Mr. Ray said he'd heard it from a customer in his shoe store downtown, Ray's Shoe Store. Mrs. Ray had heard it when she'd been out shopping in the morning at Lion's Department Store. Julia had heard it when it spread through Deep Valley High. Margaret was the only one who hadn't heard it before she'd gotten home, but she'd heard it from Betsy. Margaret's eyes were still big from hearing the news. "I don't want to see a T. rex. I'll stay home," she told the family solemnly.

"Of course you don't need to see it," said Mrs. Ray, patting her youngest daughter's hand. "I'm not sure even I want to see it. I have just a few gray hairs among my red ones -- if I saw a T. rex, I might get a lot more."

"Jules, you know I love your red hair, but I'll love you when you have white hair too. You'll still be so beautiful I don't want to take my eyes off you."

Mrs. Ray had a small grin on her pale pink face. "Oh, you go on, Bob."

He smiled back at her. "Yes, I could go on and on..."

Betsy and Julia exchanged pleased glances, like "aren't they cute?" It made them feel good when Papa and Mama talked like this. Of course, they knew their parents loved each other; it was nice to hear it in action sometimes.

"I want to see it," said Julia. "Maybe Jerry will take me."

"I want to see it, too," said Betsy. "Winona says she might get comp tickets to see it, and that she'd take Tacy and me with her, if she gets them. I think I have to see things like this -- I'm a writer, and I might want to write a story about T. rexes someday. Maybe a fair damsel will get rescued from the grips of a T. rex. I'd have to really know what one looks like to make it seem real."

"And as a shoe seller, I should see a T. rex too," said Mr. Ray with a false seriousness. "You never know when a T. rex might come into my shop wanting shoes for his family. I'd better take a look at those feet of his so I can be ready. You can never be too prepared."

"Papa," said Betsy, laughing along with her mother and sisters. "You are too funny! And now you've just given me an idea for another story. Margaret, maybe after supper I can tell you the story of the T. rex who goes to a shoe store. Would you like that?"

"Will it be scary?" asked Margaret.

"No, I think it will be funny. I can just see it in my head and I want to laugh," said Betsy.

"I like funny dinosaurs," said Margaret, happily going back to eating the roast chicken on her plate.

"Me too," said Betsy.

Betsy and Margaret helped with washing, drying and putting away dishes after dinner, and as Betsy washed the dishes, sticking her hands through the warm sudsy water, she made up a story about a T. rex named Stella who brought her little T. rex children into Papa's shoe store, asking to buy shoes for her family. Stella wore a long dress with a bustle and had a pearl necklace on, not to mention a pretty hat with fruit on it as decoration. Margaret chuckled and grinned as she wiped the dishes after Betsy washed them. "I wish the T. rex who's going to visit would wear a long dress and pearls," said Margaret. "Maybe she could wear some lipstick, too. That would be fun."

"Yeah," said Betsy. She loved making things up in her imagination. It was one of the things she loved best about being a writer.

For the next week, the coming T. rex was the talk of the town. There were some newspaper articles on it down at the library, from far away towns that had seen the visiting dinosaur along with the showman. People talked about what it would look like, what it would do, how brave or not brave they were going to be about it. For some, the idea was just too strange to even think about. Tom Slade's grandma, Grandma Slade, said she would not be seeing the dinosaur. She'd been a pioneer and lived through the wild early history of Minnesota. "No, I don't think I will go to see that dinosaur," said Grandma Slade firmly. She was a good storyteller, and Betsy admired her for that. "I've

seen a lot in my day, and my mother and father never saw a dinosaur, nor my grandparents or great grandparents. It just wouldn't seem right for me to see them, when those others never even knew dinosaurs would exist for us here and now. I will be happy to let the T. rex just live in my imagination; that's where he belongs."

For the whole week, people talked about the dinosaur coming. You couldn't go almost anywhere without someone asking about or mentioning the dinosaur. Little kids were playing scary dinosaurs on their front lawns or on the school playgrounds. Books on dinosaurs experienced a new popularity, and were all over the front window display at Cook's Books. In the last five years, of course there had been a surge of books about dinosaurs -- fiction, nonfiction, educational, entertaining. People wanted to know about dinosaurs. But as people had gotten more used to dinosaurs existing in their present-day world, the interest had died down a little from the burst that had happened those first few months. Dinosaurs were still on people's minds, but they'd gotten used to them being around, too.

But now the interest was renewed, especially info about T. rex dinosaurs. People snatched up books, and Betsy was reading more about them at the Carnegie Library. But after that first week, when no one was certain about when the showman and the dinosaur would show up in Deep Valley, the talk died down. People were still interested, but there wasn't a flame to fan in such a direct way. It was like speculating when the first snowfall would happen. You knew it would happen sometime, but the uncertainty made the immediate talk die down.

One fine fall day, a warm and sunny Saturday, Betsy and Tacy were working on writing a play together. Betsy was the writer, of course, but Tacy was a good co-writer and idea-buddy for the writing process. Betsy would write for a few minutes, she'd read

out loud what she had written, Tacy would make suggestions, toss ideas into the air, Betsy would catch them and toss them with her own and they would create something even better than either one of them would have come up with on her own. It was a different process, writing with someone, and Betsy enjoyed it both ways. She loved how private and secret writing by herself felt, coming up with stories, jotting down ideas, crossing things out, creating pictures in her mind. But writing with someone else, especially Tacy who knew her so well and who she knew so well, was different and fun. It seemed more exciting in a dramatic kind of way. Betsy would get energized by Tacy's ideas and suggestions, and then that would help her mind go in different directions than it might have just on her own.

Today they were writing a play about a fair damsel, a princess, being forced to marry a mean but wealthy merchant in her kingdom. The king was thinking only of money and power, and he knew it would be a good deal for him to have this very wealthy merchant in their family. He cared about his daughter, but he thought this would be good for her to, to have such an influential man for her husband, and she would surely learn to love him and still live a happy life. But the daughter was telling him that no, she would not learn to love him and she would not have a happy life. The king wasn't listening to her at all, he was just thinking of what he wanted to happen.

But then a young, handsome and charismatic dinosaur trader came to the kingdom one day, and the princess fell in love with him. He fell in love with her from the first moment he saw her. The princess got to spend time with him because it was her job to show the trader all the royal dinosaurs. They had a whole zoo-like garden set up for them, keeping the carnivores and predators in their own private areas, where they couldn't hurt other dinosaurs, either meat eaters or herbivores. It was like a beautiful

jungle of green, with special fenced off areas for each kind of dinosaur. The king liked to joke that he was set up for being the Noah of dinosaurs, that if he needed to build an arc because of a great flood he could just bring all his many pairs of dinosaurs right aboard. He would save these beasts for posterity.

So the princess gave the trader a royal tour of the royal dinosaur gardens and all the creatures therein. She was quite smart, and knew a lot about each of their dinosaurs, and the trader was so happy by how smart she was, but was also happy just to look at her beautiful face, her pink-rosy skin, her cheerful, deep eyes, her soft lips. He was thrilled that she gave him so much more to love than just that, though. It was important for him to have a woman who was strong and smart and capable and beautiful inside, clever and kind. She was curvy, with long dark curly hair that flowed down her back like a stream, reaching past her waist. She had icy blue eyes.

And the princess loved his twinkling eyes, his sense of humor always making her laugh, his intelligence, his kindness, his empathy, and his being a good listener. He was slightly taller than she was, lean and strong, with a neat beard and mustache of warm brown that matched his eyes.

He was only planning to come to this king's kingdom for a few days to talk about dinosaur trading, to see what the king had, and make deals if he could. He had a satchel full of notes from talking to other kingdoms and towns and people. He traveled and made deals between towns and then facilitated the movements of dinosaurs to the various parties who wanted to trade. But as he talked to the princess every day, his plans to move on were delayed, by this or by that. Either the princess made up another reason for him stay, or he did. Until at last, they had some romantic moments between them,

some sweet kisses shared, and then a serious talk about the future, a future that they both knew they wanted to share together.

The princess tearfully told the handsome dinosaur trader about her father's plans for her to marry the mean wealthy merchant. "I don't want to," she told the trader. "Even before I met you, I didn't want to marry him. But my father isn't listening to me. He is only seeing things from his point-of-view."

The trader took her hand. "I will talk to him. Maybe we can make this work out. I'm not as wealthy as this merchant, but I have good things to offer to the kingdom. And most of all I would treat his lovely daughter right and make her happy. Surely he will want that too. Maybe I can make him see my side, our side of things."

He took his handkerchief and dabbed at her eyes gently, wiping away the tears, then held her close for a long while. In the evening, he made appointment to speak to the king. They met in the king's private living room, which looked nice with leather and wood and furs, but was still casual, with its comfy furniture. The princess waited in the library while they talked, barely able to focus on the book she'd pulled off the book shelf. Usually reading was a pleasure of hers, and she loved getting lost in a good book, in the story and plot. But tonight, she kept reading the same few sentences over and over again.

The trader came out looking pale, and very quiet. He shook his head when the princess asked about what the king had said. He took her by the hand and led her outside. Only when they were far away from the castle did he tell her what they had discussed.

"Your father said he likes me, but that he feels like he has already made a bargain with the merchant. He did offer one solution -- that we could have a duel, and whoever is alive at the end can marry you." The trader gulped at the idea of that and looked away.

"That's ridiculous!" The princess tore away from him and ran back into the castle. She stormed into the king's parlor. "A duel, a fight to the death? Really, Father! How barbaric!"

But the king had gone as cold as a marble statue. "Daughter, you do not understand the ways of ruling a kingdom. This is the only way I can see out of the deal with the merchant. Perhaps he will back out of the marriage proposal upon hearing about the conditions. But I must save face... not just for my own sake, but for the sake of the respect of the monarchy!"

"How dare you?" shouted the princess. "Someone must die in order for me to marry? I would not have any man who would be involved in such a ridiculous charade."

"So be it then. Just marry the merchant and your trader will live," said the king. He had on his hard face now, the one she knew wouldn't crack at all.

Growing more upset by the minute, the princess ran out of the castle, looking for the trader, finding him packing up his possessions as if he was leaving. She looked at him with crestfallen eyes. "You're not going, are you?" she asked, full of sadness.

His eyes were sad as well. "I love you, sweetheart, but I won't fight someone to the death for such insane purposes. I'm sorry to say but the king is mad. He can't see reason. And the merchant, I've met him, and I don't think he will back out of the marriage. He has quite a large gun collection and I think he would like the chance to use it. Being involved in this wouldn't do either of us -- you or me -- any good. How warmly would

you feel about marrying me, knowing that I had to senselessly murder someone to do it?"

She took his hands, so warm and strong. "I don't want that either. I do think my father is insane, or blinded so that he can't see what he is really asking. But oh, my love, you cannot go! What would my life be?"

They stood looking into each other's eyes for a long time, eyes full of love and sadness and questions and soul-searching.

They spoke at exactly the same time.

"Come with me," he said.

"Take me with you," she said.

They held hands, smiled into each other's eyes, and then fell into an embrace.

"There's nothing for me here," she told him, speaking into his shoulder. "My father will end up just controlling my life, holding my royal position over my head. I might get to be queen someday, but I would live a loveless life, being bound to the dictates of my father, and then my husband. I would rather be free -- free of the burden or royalty, free to just be myself and live my life."

He stepped back, still holding her hands in his, looking in her face, looking her up and down from head to toe. "I would love to have you come with me, as my wife, as my love, as my partner. Before a few weeks ago, I didn't even know you existed, and now you are the one I want to make my life with. Come with me, and we will have a life of adventure together. Who knows what the future will bring... I'm a dinosaur trader now, but we, my princess, can make our lives whatever we want them to be. But I think we must hurry... it won't be easy to escape the king. He will come after us. He will pursue us... and we don't know for how long. You are his only offspring. He won't let his only

heir go very easily. And considering that he came up with the idea for a duel to the death, he will probably have me killed if he ever finds me. We should leave tonight."

They quickly formulated a plan. They would leave in the night, as the whole kingdom slept. But still it wouldn't be easy for the castle guards would see them leaving, would be on the alert. Maybe it would have to be closer to dawn, to leave at a time that wouldn't be so suspicious. The princess returned to her chambers in the castle and gathered up what possessions she could take with her. She did grab many of her jewels, so they would have a source of income if they needed it in the future, though it might be hard to sell royal jewels and not be caught doing so. Unless they went to another country, far far away. And while she was in the room, she used her sewing scissors to cut off her hair. Now she could dress in her riding clothes, the ones that were more masculine. She had very short hair and could now pass as a young man. She went into the stables and got some masculine riding boots as well as a cap. And then, satchel in hand and dressed in her most non-princess fashion, like a young man, she went off to find the trader. He was ready with his own steed, and the princess would take one of the young strong horses that wouldn't be missed. As dawn began to spread its fingers over the lightening night sky, the pair of them exited the kingdom, riding casually out, past the castle guards who asked after them. The trader said he had orders from the king to pursue a dinosaur trade mission with another nearby kingdom, and that he would return in a week. He was taking the "boy" along with for help. The princess had her cap low and just nodded to the guard shyly, as she thought a young lad might do. And then she followed her trader, away from the kingdom, away from her home, away from her father, away from her future as royalty. She gave the large stone kingdom, surrounded

by a tall gray stone wall, a final glance over her shoulder as she rode into her future. And then she kept on going.

They just rode onward for several days on end, trying to get as much distance as they could from the king's castle. In one village they stopped in, they heard the gossip passing around town that the princess had escaped with a dinosaur trader and that a huge search was on. They went as incognito as they could. He was now no longer a dinosaur trader. Since they had so many mindless days of riding together, the pair discussed their future and what they would now do with their lives.

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Betsy and Tacy lay back on the crunchy brown grass beneath the backyard maple in Betsy's yard. "But what can they do now?" asked Tacy, her brows furrowed as she concentrated on the princess and the dinosaur trader in their story. "She can no longer be a princess, which is all she knows, and he can no longer be a dinosaur trader. Everybody would be suspicious of him if he did that. Where can they go to have a new life together?"

Betsy had been at this place in stories before, the crux of the moment when you as the writer just couldn't figure out what to do next. She'd been through it enough times to know that if she just waited and thought about it and gave it some time, a brilliant idea would come that would solve the problem and she'd know how to move forward. "Maybe they could find a T. rex dinosaur and take it from town to town to earn money?" Betsy joked, and Tacy gave a half laugh. "Don't worry, we'll think of something, Tacy. We just need to give it a little time. Let's walk around town a little, see if anything is going on. Just let me put this away first."

She ran off into the house with the notebook and the pencils, putting them into the cigar box in her dresser drawer in the bedroom she shared with Julia and Margaret. And then, grabbing two ginger cookies from the kitchen, she ran back outside to Tacy and they both munched the cookies as they walked.

As they neared downtown Deep Valley, after walking several blocks past Lincoln Park, they started to hear a buzz happening around the town. It reminded them of when the horseless carriage had come to town and Tib had gotten the first ride with Mr. and Mrs. Poppy. People were pouring out of buildings, talking excitedly, and shop owners were rushing out, flipping the "closed" signs on the door. Betsy and Tacy started to jog, their hearts picking up at the excitement of it all. Winona rode past them on her bike, and ever the news bearer, happily told them that the showman with the T. rex had at last come to town.

"Oh no!" shouted Tacy as she ran along.

"Oh yes!" shouted Betsy, smiling.

"If Tib were here, she'd be the first one to get to see the dinosaur, and probably for free, too!" said Tacy, panting. Tib had a way of being in the right place at the right time. And being unbelievably brave, too.

They ran toward the river front, along Front Street, where there was a big grassy area. That's where the showman and his trailer were parked, so they guessed. A crowd was gathering, and as Betsy and Tacy arrived at where the crowd was forming, they stood breathless and panting for a moment, looking at the exciting new things that were parked there. First there was a large metal box, like a large train car, rising way up above the crowd. It was a trailer on four wheels, and on all sides of it was colorful paintings, pictures painted and words in big professional circus letters, "See One of the Wonders of

the Ages!" "You Won't Believe Your Eyes!" "Amazing Prehistoric Monster!" There were close-up faces of a fierce animal with giant yellow eyes, a long snout and the most scary teeth Betsy had ever seen. It was just enough of a hint at what the creature inside must look like. "Oh, I really don't need to see any more than that," said Tacy, shivering.

In front of the trailer on wheels, or in a wagon on wheels, were four large Belgian horses, two black and two white, and they all looked so big and strong, with their height (so much taller than Old Mag), and the thickness of their bodies and legs. They stood quietly now, probably tired after pulling their heavy burden across the countryside, while a man from town fed them buckets of water. Betsy recognized the man, who worked at a local livery stable and managed the horses for the town hacks.

But where was the man of the hour? Horace B. Lester? He was the showman who would be running the show. There was no man here. Betsy overheard someone saying that Mr. Lester was checking himself into the Melborn Hotel. Which meant he probably did very well for himself. Only the more well-to-do folks who came to town stayed at the Melborn.

"So, is that monster in there, do you suppose?" asked Tacy. They both stared at the trailer, and its bright yellows and blues and reds and greens that drew the eye. The trailer was quiet and still, but you could imagine that if this dinosaur was as fierce as the paintings led you to believe, the whole trailer could be rattling and you would hear roars and growls.

"It must be. Where else could they put it? They couldn't put it in the livery stable. It could eat the horses!" said Betsy.

"I wonder how much tickets will be," said Tacy. "Maybe my papa won't be able to afford them after all. Oh gee, too bad."

"No worries, Tacy... remember, Winona promised she'd give us comps, so we'll be able to see it for free," teased Betsy.

"Maybe there's someone else who'd like mine," Tacy teased back. "We could give mine to one of the boys... it could be a date for you or Winona, wouldn't that be fun?"

"They'll see it anyway. You know they'll manage to get tickets. They always do. I want you to see it, Tacy! I'll hold your hand... we can be scared out of our wits together." Betsy looked at her with pleading eyes.

Tacy gave a shaky sigh. "Oh, you know I'll go to see it, whether I'm scared out of my mind or not. I just don't like to think about it... so it helps me if I pretend I really won't use the tickets and see it. I'll pretend right up until I see it."

"Okay, I'll quit teasing then. I just want to make sure we both get to see it!" said Betsy.

The crowd was milling around, with people inspecting the trailer from all sides. People were speculating what the beast ate. "I've heard he feeds it stray dogs and cats," said one man.

"Oh pooh, he does not," said a woman with a tall feathered hat on. "He would be run out of town if he did such a thing."

"Maybe it eats sick cows," speculated another person.

"Or maybe he's turned it into an herbivore and just feeds it straw and grass and leaves," said someone else.

"Or naughty little boys," said one man, joking.

"Not funny," said a mother with young children holding her hands.

Winona had hopped off her bike and now walked over to her friends. "What do you think he feeds the T. rex, Winona?" asked Betsy.

"I don't have a clue," she said, "but I bet my father will interview Mr. Horace B. Lester for the Deep Valley Sun, so you'll be able to read all about it in the paper soon. I'll make sure he asks about what he feeds the monster."

Sometimes Betsy was envious of Winona and her connections to the newspaper through her father, that she got to find out news early, that she often knew the inside scoop, that she got the free comps to plays and ticketed events. She got to live with the newspaper and its workings all the time. Betsy would have liked to have had those kinds of connections. Of course, she loved her own papa and it was fun that he had his Ray's Shoe Store. Their family always had the latest, good shoes, and her father was such a good businessman and community person, that he took very good care of his customers and since he liked to talk to all kinds of people, he often had news and stories early, too - - and the kinds of stories that the newspaper didn't print. Betsy felt pretty lucky about that. Her papa always made her proud. And she got these nice tablets for her writing, for free. Ray's Shoe Store... Wear Queen Quality Shoes. She had written so many stories on those note pads. Some had even been burned up in the fire, after she turned over a new leaf and stopped reading Rena's overly dramatic, romantic stories and started going to the library to read better books, real literature.

The idea of writing a story about a fierce dinosaur was capturing her now. She liked the story that she and Tacy were writing about the princess and the dinosaur trader, but maybe she could write a new story with a T. rex in it, or add one into the story they'd been writing. She'd have to see. She'd never tried to write horror before. It might be fun. She could certainly use a lot of adjectives.

After a while, the crowd started to disperse, since it looked like nothing was really going to happen that day. If Horace B. Lester had checked into a hotel, maybe he'd

stayed in for a nap and supper, because no one saw a sign of him, and nothing was happening with the trailer. Was there really a fierce monster dinosaur inside there? It seemed like not. It was just sitting there. Maybe it was all a hoax of some sort. Showmen like that had been known to come to town before. Men who were all talk, good at shouting out enticing phrases to get people to come and see something or buy something, and then it might not live up to the hype. That was always disappointing. False advertising, too. Maybe the town shouldn't get so worked up about the T. rex that might be a fake. But nothing else interesting was going on in town lately, so at least this gave people something to talk about.

Late that night, though, howlings and moanings and growls were heard to come from the river front by people who lived close to downtown. Some of them wondered if they were imagining it. But the next morning, as people started to talk, it was certain that it wasn't just something imagined, or dreamed about. It wasn't a bad nightmare, or the wind blowing. In fact, one curious man had put on his clothes over his pajamas and walked down to the trailer. "It was coming from inside," he told people, his eyes wide. "Up close, the growling was pretty fierce. And the trailer even rattled. I didn't stay down there too long. Wow, that thing has got to be strong and frighteningly tremendous."

The next day the buzzing around town started slowly, especially as Horace B. Lester was seen around the Melborn Hotel and the streets on that part of town. But he wasn't starting to promote his show yet, and he wasn't selling tickets. Papa reported at supper that night that Mr. Lester had told a few people that he needed to wait a few days before beginning to show the T. rex. "He says that after traveling, the dinosaur needs

some time to settle down, since it's agitating for him. He feeds him well and lets him rest, and then the fun will begin for Deep Valley."

"Did anyone say what they feed him, Papa?" asked Betsy. "I heard people guessing that he feeds the dinosaur stray dogs and cats. But I'm sure he doesn't. He wouldn't be very popular in the towns he goes to."

Mr. Ray laughed. "You're right. I'm sure we could ask Wilkins the butcher downtown what kind of supplies Mr. Lester has been purchasing from him. I'll bet it's cow carcasses... that would be my guess. The T. rex is a pretty big dinosaur, and I'm sure it would eat a lot of meat."

Bright and early the next morning, who should show up at the Ray family's door but Winona Root, her black hair shiny and her dark eyes snapping with excitement. She tried to be a little nonchalant but totally failed, because she couldn't stop grinning. "Betsy, Betsy! Lookee what I have!" She waved the red paper tickets in the air, three rectangular strips about the size of a dollar bill. "I got the comps! We are going to be some of the first citizens of Deep Valley to see the dinosaur!"

"Wow, that's great! Hold on a minute," she said quickly, and ran to ask her mother if it was okay if she went out and went downtown with Tacy and Winona. Her mother nodded absently in her direction, caught up in baking a pie and rolling out the pie crust.

She ran outside and jumped up and down in excitement with Winona for a few seconds, and then grabbed her hand and they ran over to Tacy's house. Tacy was immediately scared and excited, jumping up and down with them and shouting "No! No! No!" Which just made Winona and Betsy shout back at her, "yes, yes, yes!"

Tacy did have to go back inside and wash the breakfast dishes, but she said she be quick about it, so Winona and Betsy went and sat on the hitching post on the side of

Tacy's house, talking fast and imagining the actual T. rex and what it would be like. "I do hope they won't let us get too close," said Betsy. "I do want to see it, but I can stand back a bit."

"Yeah, I don't need to be too close, either. I don't need to feel it breathing on me or anything," commented Winona. "Ooh, it's going to be so scary!"

When Tacy came out, they walked together chattering, Winona gripping the comp tickets tightly. By the time they got to Front Street and the grassy area by the river, an even larger crowd had gathered than previously. The crowd was noisier too, shouting and shrieking and louder talking than the previous murmurings. Now, next to the trailer was set up a wooden ticket booth, and it looked like Mr. Horace B. Lester had hired a local townspeople to handle the ticket sales, a young man who was living at home while going to college. Betsy kept looking around for a glimpse of this Mr. Horace B. Lester... she hadn't seen him yet, and was sure most of the town hadn't either. Her guess was that he was the tall slim man in a dark coat and white shirt, with a dark mustache and very dark but small eyes, straight trim hair, a bald spot and a bowler hat. His legs were so thin and long he looked like he was walking around on poles. He was running around adjusting things concerning the colorful trailer and the ticket booth, muttering to himself. Sometimes he went inside a little door on the side of the trailer, slamming it shut behind him, and then came back out again. He had a very stern and serious look on his face, concentrating on what he was doing. "I bet that's him," said Betsy to Tacy and Winona.

"Yeah, I think you're right," agreed Winona.

For now, it was just watching, waiting, and speculating. And then at last, the mayor of Deep Valley and Winona Root's father, the editor of the Deep Valley Sun,

stepped up to the front of the crowd and stood facing all the people, their hands folded in front of them. Mr. Horace B. Lester brushed himself off, looking distracted, and then straightened up tall and seemed to collect himself. He gave a serious nod to the two gentlemen and joined them, standing to face the crowd.

Mayor Williamson cleared his throat and raised his arms, and the noise of the crowd slowly died down as people noticed that something was about to happen. "Good citizens of Deep Valley, I know many of you have been full of anticipation over the arrival of this wondrous show coming to our fair but humble town. It's not every day that we have the opportunity to see the likes of the prehistoric marvel, the Tyrannosaurus rex. We are truly living in amazing times. Let's have a round of applause for this special visitor to our town, the showman Mr. Horace B. Lester." The mayor held out his arm toward the mustached man.

Deep Valley crowds were always very good at applause -- they were enthusiastic and encouraging. They gave a big round of excited applause to Mr. Horace B. Lester. Mr. Lester got pink-cheeked and nodded his head, pleased, waiting for it to die down.

When it did get quiet, it was Mr. Lester's turn to speak. His voice was loud and booming. "My good people, I thank you for your warm welcome. It is my pleasure to bring to you the ultimate dinosaur experience. The Tyrannosaurus rex is a dinosaur of fierce reputation, a monster of ancient fables. You would not want to meet up with one in the wild, or on your street. But I, Horace B. Lester, have been touring this dinosaur around the country, visiting 30 different cities so far. I can assure you that with my show, you will be able to see a T. rex in a completely safe environment. It certainly is an amazing experience, and you may even consider it one of the wonders of the current age, that we can see a dinosaur of this caliber, up close. Now, it isn't an inexpensive task to

bring a dinosaur like this around the country in a traveling show. Not only do I have to cover the expenses of the horsepower, but there is the costs of hotels, hiring a ticket taker and the great expense of feeding the beast, who lives on a diet of beef, bison, venison and pork. He is large, and so is his appetite. So, while I would like to charge a nickel for a ticket to view the beast and make it accessible for everyone, I must sadly charge 50 cents a ticket."

As the crowd gave a little gasp, Mr. Lester responded. "I know, I know, this is asking a lot of you fine people. But this is truly a one-of-a-kind experience and a little sacrifice will be necessary. I can assure you that it will be worth it. And your children will see the beast and be able to one day tell their children the wondrous tale of how they got to see the amazing T, rex dinosaur."

Now that Mr. Horace B. Lester was done speaking, a murmur went through the crowd again. You could hear the phrase "50 cents... 50 cents... 50 cents..." being repeated over and over again. Betsy was so glad that Winona had got the tickets for free, otherwise they might not be able to afford to go. Papa would want to take the whole family, and that would be two dollars and 50 cents, well, less if Margaret really didn't want to go. Winona looked at her and smiled, and Betsy mouthed a "thank you" to her.

Mr. Root, Winona's father, was the one to speak last. As he raised his hands, again the crowd started to slowly quiet down. When it was a low enough rumble, Mr. Root began to speak. "My dear people, I would just like to say, in brief, that I haven't yet had the opportunity to see this wondrous beast, but I am looking forward to it greatly. I know I wouldn't want to miss this astounding opportunity, and I ask that you consider this point as you decide whether or not to purchase tickets for the show. This has been the talk of the town for weeks, and it is sure to be for quite some time. Be a part of the

experience, if you at all can. And there will be an article or a few on this topic in *The Deep Valley Sun*. We may need interviews with audience members of the shows for a future article, and I will let you know. Thank you for your time."

Betsy liked Mr. Root. He seemed very important, since he ran the newspaper, and he'd kindly published Betsy's poem, "The Curtain Goes Up," which she'd written after seeing her first big play at the Opera House, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. She was just a kid, and by putting the poem on the front page of the newspaper, it seemed he had taken her at least partially serious as a writer, too. It had been her first time being published, and she'd been so pleased and proud. She really wanted to be a real writer someday. (Tacy would nudge her and tell her she already was a real writer, that she was already a better writer than many adults. Betsy humbly expected that Tacy was probably right, even if she might exaggerate a little).

And then the three gentlemen gave waves to the crowd and Mr. Horace B. Lester led them over to the side of the trailer. They were going to view the dinosaur, be the first in Deep Valley to view the T. rex, and now they would do it in front of the crowd. As enticement, Mr. Lester opened the door and gestured to the men to enter ahead of him. Some people standing on the side that the door was on tried to step or lean to the side to see if they could get a peek inside, but it was dark in there and the dinosaur was not right in the view of the door. And now the door was closed, and they could hear stirrings from inside, loud rumbly growling noises. And then a deeper roar and a shaking of the metal trailer. Was this part of an act, to get the people to part from their hard-earned money? For 50 cents each? It seemed very authentic and real from what the crowd experienced. The men spent several moments in the trailer, and watching it was almost

like watching Houdini perform a trick. There was anxiety, because you could see people you knew and loved in your town entering into this potentially dangerous situation, and the shaking and growling only made people more anxious. Betsy gave Winona's arm a squeeze, only to find that Tacy was doing the same thing on the other side of Winona. Winona took a deep ragged breath, and Betsy could sympathize with her totally -- if it was her father, she would be nervous too. Who knows what it was really like in there, and if this Horace B. Lester really knew what he was talking about with safety and security?

And then after a few long moments, the door opened and the three men came out, to much relieved cheering from the crowd. Winona's face relaxed too, and she gave a loud whistle. The mayor and Mr. Root raised their clasped hands above their heads like champions just out of a boxing match. They were full of smiles. And not wanting to speak to the crowds again, they went forth and walked among the people, shaking hands with the men and giving off little comments that just made people want to see the show more. Betsy heard the two men saying things like, "What an amazing creature," or "bigger than my bungalow," or "he looked at me and I just froze," and "terrible, teeth."

It just made Betsy shiver, and she looked over at Winona and Tacy, and saw they were doing the same thing. They weren't sure when Mr. Lester would be opening up the show, but they were assuming they would be one of the first to see the dinosaur, since they had the comps. They watched him shaking hands and laughing with folks in the crowd, as the other men were doing, and then some tall guy clapped him on the back. "So when can the rest of us see this T. rex? We are getting so excited to get a look at the fella."

Mr. Horace B. Lester looked down at his chest and grabbed the gold orb that was hanging there by a chain. He lifted the pocket watch to his eyes and then looked like he was calculating something in his head. "I think we can start the first showing within the hour. I need to go back to the hotel momentarily, but then it will be time." He smiled at the tall man, and it didn't take long for the news to spread through the crowd, like fire on dry paper.

Herbert Humphreys and Tom Slade ran up to them then, whooping it up as they stopped by Winona and Betsy and Tacy. "Can you believe it? We're going to get to see the T. rex today!" shouted Herbert. "You girls aren't too scared to see it, are you?"

Winona tossed back her black braids and said with a scoff, "What do you mean, scared?" She whipped out her three comp tickets. "We're going to be in the first group to see that old lizard. We've already got our tickets."

"Aw, you're way ahead of us then," said Tom. "No tickets for us yet, but we've got our fifty cents. We'll see it as soon as we can."

Tacy grabbed onto Betsy's hand and squeezed hard. Betsy knew she was on the verge of offering her comp to one of the boys (probably Tom, because she knew him so well) but Betsy just squeezed her hand back -- if Tacy gave up comps this time, Winona might not give them comps again for another show. So Tacy was going to have to buck up and swallow hard and just go.

They had some fun back and forth talking and teasing with Herbert and Tom, who were very hyped up about the whole thing, but then the whole town seemed to be. This was the biggest thing that had happened since the special Fourth of July fireworks last summer, and this was definitely bigger.

Mr. Horace B. Lester left the crowd for a while, and then came back. It was now late afternoon, and the crowd was restless. He gave instructions to his ticket taker and set him up in the little wooden booth, handing out tickets to those with 50 cents. Some people in the crowd were holding back, happy to let others be among the first to see the dinosaur. But a long line was forming already. Winona led the way to the front of the line, and waiting for the ticket-taking young man to notice her after the man buying a ticket had stepped away. "I have three comp tickets," said Winona assertively. "So we should be among the first group to go in to see the show." She sounded like a self-assured grownup, one whom others might have trouble saying "no" to.

The young man nodded to her. "Why don't you go to the front of the group over there. Mr. Lester will be taking people in shortly." He pointed over by the side of the trailer.

Winona nodded and marched over to the front of the group, Betsy trying to march as confidently, and Tacy rounding her shoulders and looking like she was being dragged. Betsy was starting to wonder if Tacy would bolt, like she did back when they were in kindergarten for the first day. She remembered how recess had come late in the morning and when they went outside to play in the school yard, Tacy had just started to run and kept on going, never looking back, because she was so upset about being new in school. Betsy had run after her, afraid of being in trouble with the teacher, but knowing she needed to go after Tacy. She'd only managed to catch up with her friend over by Mrs. Chubbock's candy store. They had both stood outside crying together until Mrs. Chubbock came out and gave them chocolate men to eat, trying to comfort them with something sweet. And the teacher had come running after them, sweetly and nicely trying to get them to come back to school. Tacy had at last agreed to do it when the

teacher had promised that Tacy could sit in the same chair as Betsy, each of them squished onto half the seat.

But so far today Tacy hadn't bolted. Betsy gave a look back at her, and her face was pale, like she was trying not to think about it. Aw, poor thing, thought Betsy. Tacy is such a strong person and she isn't usually afraid, but Betsy could tell this one was throwing her. And Betsy could see it, because frankly she was afraid of the T. rex too, and thought it was perfectly normal to be afraid. She guessed that almost everyone in the crowd was afraid -- certainly, a T. rex was something to be afraid of! It was a fierce monster, a killer, a prehistoric predator come to life again. Being afraid was natural, and yet, it seemed like it was a safe environment in which to face their fears. At least, she hoped it was!

They stood at the front of the crowd, watching as Mr. Horace B. Lester ran around getting things ready. He ran inside to the T. rex, banged a few things, and then came out again. At last he cleared his throat and made an announcement that the first 20 ticket holders could come inside. Everyone would have 10 minutes of time inside to witness the T. rex, whose name was Teddy. He explained the safety rules they must follow. Everyone was to be as calm and quiet as possible, to not over excite Teddy. Nobody was to throw anything, and everyone should stand back from the cage inside. They would all go in as a group and leave as a group. Nobody was to try to feed the dinosaur. "We must understand that Teddy is a fearsome and wild creature, and his behavior can be unpredictable if provoked. We need to respect his animal nature, just as you would any of the animals you encounter in your daily life. And if everyone can follow the rules, then you'll get to have the experience of a lifetime, a one of a kind historical step back in time."

Winona and Betsy and Tacy all looked at each other and clasped hands tightly. This was it! They would be going in to see the dinosaur. Tacy squeezed her eyes shut and scrunched up her face. But when they started to move, she gave Betsy a little "ack!"-look but determinedly walked forward.

Herbert and Tom, who were not in the crowd that was going in first, had squeezed up toward the front of the onlookers. They waved to the three girls. "Don't get eaten!" Herbert shouted, his eyes sparkling with excitement and teasing.

"Don't get too close," shouted Tom, waving.

This time, both Betsy and Tacy gulped.

Chapter 3: Face to Face with Teddy

Mr. Horace B. Lester opened the door, a tall cutout in the drawings on the trailer, and motioned the girls to go inside. Winona was the very first person in the group to go in, followed by Betsy, who was followed by Tacy. The trailer was large and tall, almost as tall as a two-story house. It had to be to hold such a tall beast, since the T. rex walked around on two legs. It was dark inside, too, with just enough light given off by the windows in the top of the trailer that let in daylight, and one large gas-lit lamp hanging on the wall. There was a spooky sense of entering a haunted house, a darkened and unknown place, not sure if things would jump out or pop out on arrival. Or what might scurry underfoot. Winona walked in slowly and carefully, looking up and around cautiously with big eyes. They all certainly hoped the T. rex was behind some kind of strong cage, or separated from them in some secure fashion. Of course, it must be, if Mr. Horace B. Lester had taken this show to 30 different towns around the United States of America. Betsy and Tacy followed behind Winona, slowly and cautiously. No one in this crowd was in a great hurry, or eager enough to push and shove.

At first, their eyes were adjusting to the dim lighting, and they could see walls and the glow of the gas light. While the outside of the metal trailer was decorated and colorful with pictures of dinosaurs and enticing words, the inside was plain white-washed walls and dismal. No one had bothered much with the appearance or ambiance. People were not really in there to look at the trailer. Their eyes would be focused on one thing and one thing only.

The floor of the trailer was strewn with straw, not deep, but it had a barn-like quality to it. They crept forward, not yet seeing the monster. As their eyes adjusted, they

could see thick metal bars about half way back, bars that went along the whole width of the trailer and rose up to the high ceiling. They were thick bars, like those used in barns to keep cows and horses and pigs in stalls. There was about a foot between each bar, going up in horizontal stripes.

Betsy gulped, creeping slowly forward, little step by little step, clamping her hand firmly onto Winona's bony shoulder, and Tacy's hand was clamped to Betsy's shoulder, from behind. The other 17 people followed them closely, and everyone was quiet, looking up and around, until finally they were all inside the trailer, forming a little group at the back by the door they'd just come in. They were all quiet, and their first hint of the monster in the room was the sound of deep breathing, a loud beastly rumble of a hot furnace. They could smell it too, a tangy animal odor, a bit of animal waste and a sour smell of breath.

Scary.

And then their eyes adjusted, and they could just start to make out a large shape in the shadows. It wasn't moving, just breathing in and breathing out loudly, heavily, and they weren't sure if it was sleeping, or just watching a waiting quietly, like a cat waiting to pounce on its prey. If so, they were the prey.

The crowd pushed forward a little, and only a little, as Mr. Horace B. Lester stepped into the trailer and closed the door behind him. "Step forward, please," he said in a low voice. "This is what you've been waiting for. Exciting, isn't it?"

Suddenly, even for the bravest of Deep Valley folks inside the trailer, it wasn't so exciting to be in a large metal can so close to a T. rex -- it didn't seem like such a good idea at all, and to have paid 50 cents for this privilege!

Mr. Horace B. Lester walked around the back and side of the crowd to get to the front. "Come along, folks, don't be timid. Teddy's just a big pet dog, aren't you Teddy?" He stepped in front of the crowd with his back to them. He clapped his hands together loudly, which made everyone jump, clapping over and over again and shouting, "Wake up, Teddy! Time to say hello to the people! WAKE UP NOW!!"

The shadowed form started to move, and then the two large yellow eyes opened and glowered at them, causing a murmur in the crowd. It was real. It was alive. And it was looking right at them.

"Here, Teddy. Come forward now. Time to give the people what they paid their hard-earned money for. Show them what a magnificent creature you really are!" Mr. Lester continued his clapping.

Now it was a growl so deep it sounded like the earth was opening up and swallowing someone. And then the loud thudding of huge footsteps, and a clang, like maybe a strong tail hitting the metal trailer. The head came down from the towering height it had been at, threateningly down to their level, the eyes glaring at them, the loud breath something they could hotly feel. And then, in response to Mr. Lester's clapping and shouting -- after he had told the viewers to be quiet and calm -- the eyes blinked and the growl turned into a defiant, deafening roar! The crowd whimpered and squirmed and squealed quietly -- they were too afraid to do anything more -- and pressed back into the back wall of the trailer.

Mr. Lester now turned on another gas light over by the barred cage, so the trailer was much more lit up, and the full terror that was Teddy the T. rex was revealed, causing all 20 of the crowd members to gasp. The dinosaur was as tall as many of the houses in Deep Valley. It had an enormous head with sinister yellow eyes fixed right on them, and

a large snout with such wide snapping jaws. It breathed at them now with a sharp-toothed grin that looked like it could easily eat five of them at once. Its skin was greenish-gray with a leathery bumpiness to it, dry and pock marked. Teddy had little grasping arms, compared to the rest of him, with sharp claws on the end. It didn't look like he could do much with those arms, but Betsy was sure they had some devious purpose she just couldn't see. His body was long, could stand up tall or swing flat and horizontal, with his thick scaly tail pointing downward, or straight back. It looked like he needed it for balance, since he had a funny shape and such a big head for his body. He seemed like a contrast, with thick tail, short arms and enormous head, relatively small glowing eyes. And then his legs and feet, tall and relatively scrawny legs (in comparison to the girth of his body) and pointed, bird-like feet. He was truly a monster unlike any they had seen before.

Mr. Horace B. Lester was now going into a diatribe about the T. rex, giving facts like a science teacher or a museum docent. This is where he lived, when he lived (the Cretaceous period, not the Jurassic one like many people thought). Betsy often liked facts and research, but right now the only research and facts she wanted were her own powers of observation. She wished now she had her writing notebook with her and a pencil, but then she knew she wouldn't have wanted to look away to write anything down. She was terrified, just as she knew Tacy was, and probably Winona too. She knew she could take notes with her mind, and would rely on her keen memory (at least she hoped it was, and wouldn't be an empty memory out of fright or shock). Heart beating, she thought of how to describe the beast in her own mind, her own words. She knew that the moment she got home, after she talked about it to her family (because of course

they'd want to hear all about it) she would take her tablets and pencils and write it all down. That would help her to process it all and to cement the memory into her mind.

After the big roar, and the beast coming forward toward the bars, it got quiet and just watched them, continuing its loud breathing. For some reason, after the initial reaction of total fear and adrenaline-rush and heart-pounding, the girls found themselves feeling calmer and braver. Maybe they felt better after seeing how the T. rex approached the bars, which looked very strong, and he didn't seem to want to crash forward to eat them. Because of this, people started to step forward, curiosity winning out over fear. This was their time to examine the beast, to see it up close, and then to leave it behind. For now, they were mesmerized by something so huge and fierce, by the jagged teeth as long as bananas, by something that looked so foreign to their civilized world.

"I can't believe creatures like this just wandered the earth millions of years ago," said Winona.

"I know," said Betsy. "I can't believe we're seeing a real live one now. And I'm glad it's not roaming the earth free right now."

"I wonder if any are," said Tacy, shivering. "Because if this one is here, there must be others in the world. I hate to think of it."

"It's best not to think about it," said Betsy. "Hopefully the experts in charge know how to handle it all. Let's cross our fingers."

"And toes," said Winona, standing and crossing her fingers in front of them. They looked down at her toes, which were hidden by her shoes. "Yes, they're crossed in there."

Teddy the T. rex roared a few more times, so loud it hurt their ears. They almost expected fire to come out of his mouth when he roared, since he actually seemed like a

dragon come to life. If he'd been a fire-breathing dragon, though, it certainly would have felt like an oven in the trailer, and they might've all been cooked to a crisp by now.

Mr. Lester was now taking questions from the group. He stood in front, pointing out different aspects of the big dinosaur.

"What does he eat?" asked a man behind Betsy.

"Teddy and all other T. rex dinosaurs are certainly carnivores, and when they lived in the wild, they were master predators, going after larger dinosaurs, thinking nothing of taking out a triceratops, or a few of them might gang up on an Apatosaurus -- those very heavy dinosaurs with the extra-long neck and tail. In captivity, Teddy and other T. rex like him need to eat the equivalent of about two cow carcasses a day, sometimes more. I don't only feed him beef, though. It depends on what is available and affordable in any town."

A young boy in a cap over on one side asked the next question. "How did you get him?"

"Well, it's kind of an interesting story. I was out West working as a carnie in a circus. The Brodsky Brothers Circus had branched out into adding dinosaurs to their circus acts. Nights were always long in the circus, and sometimes we have poker games to pass the time. I ended up playing poker one night with Bluto Brodsky, one of the owners and founders of the circus. Pardon me for saying it, but whiskey had been passed around at that particular game, and I ended up winning Teddy from Bluto with a four-of-a-kind. I think the Brodskys were actually relieved to get rid of him. it wasn't easy managing a dinosaur of that caliber. So I decided to take off with him and develop my traveling showman show, with Teddy. We've been doing it ever since."

The girls all exchanged wide eyed glances at each other. A tale involving whiskey! In their respectable town, and in their parents' circles, that was almost unheard of. That was daring and wild. And if there was alcohol, grownups certainly didn't talk about it in front of children. That just wasn't done. But it seemed that Mr. Horace B. Lester came from quite a different world than the one they knew. He had lived on the fringes, and now he went around the country showing a deadly dinosaur to audiences. "I suppose I should know these kinds of things if I'm going to be a writer," thought Betsy to herself. "Not that I need to or want to write about people drinking alcohol. But it's important to know what's going on in the world, to not live a very sheltered existence. It will help my writing, I know. Just by knowing the world and all the different kinds of people in it."

Soon Mr. Lester said it was time for them to go. Their 10 minutes was up. This time, while the girls had been first to enter the trailer, they wanted to be last to leave. It seemed important to take in Teddy for all the time they could. They approached the bars and he brought his head down low to peer at them. They were getting an up front and close up look at him, as close as they were willing to go. He leaned toward the bars and they could actually feel his hot breath. And then Tacy noticed something. "I think he's smelling us," she said. Because he did indeed seem to be taking them in, with his eyes and ears and maybe smelling them.

Winona swung her hand around front, holding it out like she was giving him permission to smell her. The last few people walked out and Mr. Horace B. Lester held the door. Betsy and Tacy and Winona stood taking last minute looks at the dinosaur when Teddy sprang forward with a lightning quick motion and growled in a thunder-worthy growl, pushing his face so his snout rattled and banged against the thick rail of bars. He looked like he wanted to eat Winona's hand, and probably all of her. The girls

couldn't help themselves and screamed for the first time, adrenaline rushing through them from Teddy's reaction. And even worse, the bars rattled when he pushed against them. They all had visions of him breaking through those bars and eating all three of them in one, banana-toothed bite. Gulp!

"Teddy!" shouted Mr. Lester, running forward, banging both his hands on the bars. The dinosaur retreated back into the shadows with a whimpering groan. "Sorry, girls. You got too close. He is a little agitated, and he doesn't react well. Come now, let's let him be alone for a little while now. It's time to go." He motioned them forward with his arm and then swept it around them in a half circle as he escorted them out. He seemed agitated too. When they got outside and he shut the door, he took off his black bowler hat and wiped his brow with the handkerchief from his suit coat pocket.

"We're sorry, Mr. Lester," said Tacy, looking up at him with troubled eyes. "We should have listened to you better."

Mr. Lester grimaced, frowning with his eyes, eyebrows, cheeks, nose, mouth and posture. He stood with his back to the crowd, and bent down to talk to them in a quiet but rageful hiss: "You girls nearly gave me a heart attack in there! I told everyone to stay back for a reason. Now Teddy is all riled up and I'll have to let him rest overnight to calm him down, so we won't be able to let anybody else in tonight. You could have gotten hurt! I think it's best if you go home now."

Betsy, Tacy and Winona were taken aback. Mr. Lester had seemed pretty nice before, and sure, he was pretty upset himself over a possibly dangerous situation, but he didn't have to treat them like this. "Okay, we'll go!" seethed Winona, spitting out the words to him. She turned on the spot and strode away, while Betsy and Tacy, looking more chagrined, hurried after her.

They left the entrance to the trailer, and Mr. Lester turned and re-entered the trailer, slamming the door once he was inside. They heard him yelling a bit, probably at Teddy the dinosaur, and Betsy guessed he was not handling his feelings well. It had been such an exhilarating half hour: waiting to go in to see the unknown quantity, the dinosaur that otherwise existed only in their imaginations (until they saw him and were sure he was real); the fear and excitement as they entered the trailer; the amazement of seeing an actual T. rex for the first time; and the fear of him growling and Winona's close call. It had been intense. They were ready to go home now, but were glad to have the 20-minute walk to talk amongst themselves.

Betsy, Tacy and Winona noticed that the crowd had gotten re-energized once their group had come out of the trailer. The crowd erupted with shouts of questions and requests for descriptions and from many, an exhalation of relief. They were all excited and curious and eager. Herbert and Tom were waiting to talk to them. Mr. Lester hadn't yet come out to announce that there would be no further showings tonight. "We have our tickets," said Herbert, waving his in front of their faces. "Was it worth it?"

"Was it like seeing a monster?" asked Tom, his eyes wide.

"Oh yes," said Betsy, "he's really an amazing creature. A monster in every sense of the word. His face is fierce and his teeth are huge! You definitely get your money's worth."

"Even if we'd had to pay 50 cents, it would be worth it," said Tacy who was still shaking from the experience, but almost giddy with relief too.

"I've never seen anything like it. I imagine that nobody in this town has ever seen anything like it. It's going to knock your socks off," said Winona.

"Whoa, I can't wait!" said Herbert.

"Well, unfortunately it looks like you will have to wait, probably until tomorrow," explained Winona. She loved it when she was in-the-know and could share information that hardly anybody else knew. Betsy had noticed this about Winona, that she was the one who liked to reveal any news. Betsy wondered if this was because her dad was a newspaper editor, and that that was his focus. "The dinosaur got pretty riled up just as we were leaving the trailer, and that made Mr. Lester upset too. So he was guessing that he'd have to wait until tomorrow for Teddy to calm down."

"Shucks," said Tom. "But we'll wait as long as we have to, won't we, Herbert? We aren't going to miss this -- it's a one-of-a-kind event."

"Yes sirree," said Herbert.

It was getting later and the girls decided it was time to go home. They'd had all that anticipation and now were on the waning end. It was good to have it over, to just be able to enjoy and think about and tell others about what they'd seen and experienced.

"Was it as bad as you thought it would be?" Betsy asked her.

"Well, yeah, it was," admitted Tacy, bowing her head a little as if she was embarrassed, letting her long red ringlets partially cover up her face. "But maybe not as bad as I thought it was going to be, because we didn't get eaten."

"You really thought you might get eaten?" Winona asked, teasingly.

"Well yes, it could have happened. That was what I was most worried about, because it was all unknown. Like if we'd had the chance to swim with sharks, or something. We just don't know what's actually going to happen. So I imagine the worst."

"And some people say that I have too big of an imagination," remarked Betsy.

"Not all the time, just in extreme cases like this." Tacy shrugged. "I wish Tib had been able to come and see this."

"Oh, Tib! Yes, she would have loved this. She probably would have danced into the trailer and hypnotized Teddy with her Baby Dance," said Betsy, eyes glittering as she imagined their yellow puff-haired petite friend doing just that.

"She probably would've managed to be the very first person in all of Deep Valley to see him, too," remarked Winona dryly. "Like she managed to get that ride in the horseless carriage first, when I thought I was going to be first."

Betsy put her arm around Winona's shoulder and gave her a squeeze. "Oh Winona, don't blame Tib for that. She's so pretty and little, and she can't help it how people respond to her. Don't hold a grudge. We never get that kind of attention either, do we, Tacy?"

"Nope. Tib is special. We aren't jealous of her, though. She can't help it, and she never thinks she's better than anyone else because of it," said Tacy.

Winona sighed. "Oh, I know that Tib is a great kid. It's too bad she had to move."

"It's really too bad," said Betsy.

They walked on in silence for a few minutes, all three of them thinking about Tib.

Winona broke the silence. "What are you going to tell your family about Teddy?"

Talking about this took up the rest of the walk from Front Street in downtown Deep Valley, to Winona's house, where they stopped first. It was getting dark already a little bit, so the house was lit up, at least on the main floor. Winona's mother was probably cooking dinner, as were all of their mothers. Men didn't cook much, except special things like Mr. Ray and his onion sandwiches.

Betsy and Tacy then walked the last two blocks together. They were still sharing observations and details about the Teddy experience. It was helping them to process this, since it had had an upsetting ending.

"Good night, Tacy, have fun telling your family all about it!" cried Betsy, waving her hand as she turned toward the little yellow cottage.

"Yeah, won't it be fun to tell Julia and Katie, since we got to see something important first, for a change," called Tacy, waving back.

Betsy smiled as she walked, remembering all the days when she and Tacy had fought with Julia and Katie, the older, bossier, big sisters. It used to happen all the time when they were younger, and now that Katie and Julia were in high school, this dynamic had shifted. They didn't seem so interested in being bossy and lording it over the little sisters, when they used to live for that kind of thing. Maybe they were growing up, maybe they were all growing up. But not quite enough that Betsy wouldn't enjoy getting to tell about seeing the T. rex before her big sister did.

Betsy also noticed now, as she had before, that she did not have the same kind of bossy-big-sister-thing going on with Margaret. Maybe because Margaret was 5 years younger than her, when Julia and she were only 2 years apart. Maybe because Margaret was so serious and reserved, very different from Betsy and Julia in temperament. She just wasn't a silly, carefree little girl; she never had been. That's why the family often teased that she was a Persian Princess.

Betsy ran up the steps as daylight faded. She could hear the dinner preparations going on inside, could smell the good aroma of roast of some kind, the starchiness of potatoes boiling on the little wood stove in the kitchen. She savored these, and savored the excitement of getting to share her news.

Papa was sitting in his arm chair in the parlor, his feet up on the wooden stool. He was hidden behind the open pages of the Deep Valley Sun he was holding up. "Look who's home," he called to the kitchen. He let the paper flop down so he could see his

daughter. "Betsy, we thought you weren't going to make it home for dinner, since it's getting so late."

"I made it!" said Betsy, rushing to take off her coat and then helped her mother set the table. "When you hear my news, you'll know why I was so late. I have a good reason," she teased her parents, with a lilting sing-song to her voice.

"What is it?" said her mother, carrying out the beef roast and setting it on the table. It was steaming and glistening, having just come out of the oven.

"I want the whole family to hear it," said Betsy, "so you'll just have to wait." Betsy put out the silverware at each of the five places.

"Not for long," said Mrs. Ray, untying the kerchief she covered her hair with while cooking sometimes. "Call your sisters, Betsy. We are ready."

In a few moments, each member of the Ray family was sitting down for dinner. It was such a cozy time, especially in the autumn when it was getting dark earlier and the light around the table glowed golden on all their faces. Betsy knew it was best to wait until all the food had been served, and then she would be welcome to tell her news.

Papa was savoring his first bite of roast. After he swallowed, he looked at his bright-eyed middle daughter and asked, "So, what's the news, Betsy? Am I right in guessing it has something to do with that T. rex down by the river? That seems to be all that anyone can talk about these days. I must say, I'm getting a little tired of it myself."

"Oh yes, Papa," said Betsy eagerly. "I know that's the big news in town, and I know it gets tiresome to hear people go on and on about it, like they have been for weeks now. But there is a really good reason for people to be excited."

She paused and looked around at each member of her family.

"Winona got Tacy and me comp tickets to see the T. rex, and tonight we got to be the first ones to go into the trailer and see it. And people should be excited about this dinosaur, especially this dinosaur, because it really is more amazing than you can even imagine. He really does look like a monster -- his head is huge and his mouth opens up like that oven down at the bakery, full of the biggest banana teeth you've ever seen. We heard him roar and growl, and it just goes straight through your body." Betsy shivered just thinking about it.

Julia was looking at her a bit skeptically. "Are you sure it's real?"

"Oh yes, there's no denying it's real. At first I thought, before we went into the trailer, that it must be some elaborate fake, just another carnival show-man who makes something sound real and amazing when it isn't anything like that. But this time you know it's real. You wish it weren't, but it certainly is."

Margaret's eyes were round saucers. "A real monster it down by the river? What if it gets out?" her voice was quivering with fear.

"Oh honey, it's okay," soothed Mrs. Ray, putting a hand over her baby daughter's little hand setting on the table.

"It won't happen, princess," said Mr. Ray reassuringly. "This man, Mr. Horace B. Lester, has been traveling all over the country with this dinosaur. He has a very strong trailer. He won't escape anywhere, and not in Deep Valley."

"They have a very strong cage with thick metal bars inside the trailer," said Betsy, enjoying her moment to be the one with the info this time, to be the one in-the-know. No wonder Winona likes it! "We were close to him and he roared at us, but he couldn't get past those bars."

Margaret sighed. Her eyebrows relaxed a little, but she was still worried. "I won't go to see him," she said firmly.

Mrs. Ray smiled at her. "I'm with you, Margaret. I have no need to see this particular dinosaur. Why don't we stay home and read stories, nice fairy tales with no dinosaurs in them?"

Margaret nodded.

"Well, I'm sure I'll see the beast myself," said Mr. Ray. "It's too much of a history lesson come to life, and I'm just too curious to miss it. How about you, Julia?"

Julia's eyes lit up. "Oh, I'll see it, Papa. I can't let Betsy have all the adventures. Jerry was talking about taking me, tomorrow or the next day."

Betsy had one of the inner smiles, knowing that she'd gotten to see the dinosaur first.

The next day, the town was abuzz again. Mr. Horace B. Lester would open up the show again at 10:00 in the morning. There was a long line in front of the ticket booth, and another long line of ticket holders waiting to get into the show. Betsy, Tacy and Winona went down to survey all the happenings-- this was the most exciting and or eventful thing going on, for sure. And now they could talk to all the people waiting in line like old pros, as if they knew everything, because ho-hum, they'd already seen this dinosaur a million times already, or so you would think to hear Winona going on about it.

"Be sure you stay as still as you can in there," advised Winona to a group of kids. "I got a little too close and held out my hand to him, and he roared so loudly and snapped at me so fiercely I almost jumped out of my skin. Isn't that right, Betsy?"

Betsy nodded. "I almost did too. He roared so loudly I thought my eardrums would burst." She covered her ears with her hands.

Herbert gave one of those teasing sneers. "Aw, I wouldn't be scared if he roared. Big deal."

Winona snapped back. "Oh yeah, I dare you to throw your hat into the cage. Then you'll see how it is."

Tom interjected, "I think I'd be more afraid of Mr. Lester roaring at me."

Betsy said, "He did yell at us after Teddy roared. That wasn't fun."

The crowds started moving, and Tom and Herbert ended up going into the second show that day. Betsy, Tacy and Winona, having nothing better to do, just hung out and waited to see people's reactions coming out.

"Holy moly, that was the most amazing thing ever!" shouted Herbert when he exited the trailer. He had his gray-and-black checked hat in his hand and snapped it though the air forcefully, to get out some of his own energy. "I've never seen anything like that."

"Heck, I've never even imagined something like that," said Tom, who followed him out of the trailer. "Not in my worst nightmares, and I've had some bad ones."

The five of them chatted together excitedly, walking away from the trailer to a clear grassy spot by the river, away from the bustle of the show. They went over every aspect of the dinosaur in minute detail, remembering everything they could about the experience. Everything from "did you see those eyes? I bet they glow yellow in the dark!" to "How many teeth do you think were in that huge mouth? Over a hundred?"

It was a very satisfying day for Betsy and Tacy and Winona, even though they essentially did nothing.

When Betsy went home for dinner that night, Julia announced that Jerry had indeed taken her to see the T. rex. Now the dinosaur show fueled the dinner table conversation for another night. Nobody seemed to be getting tired of it quite yet. Mr. Ray said he was planning to close up his shop for a little the next day and go see for himself what the fuss was about.

Midmorning, Betsy and Tacy showed up on Winona's front porch, as was their usual ritual of late. "Yoo hoo, Winona!" they called, trying not to be too loud but still get their friend's attention.

Winona poked her head out and nodded at them. "I'll be out in a minute," she said. She went back in, and it was 5 minutes before she appeared again. "Are you going down to the river again?" she asked them. When they said yes, she sat down on the front steps of the porch and sighed. "I think I'm going stay away from there today. I'm just not up for it."

Betsy and Tacy exchanged puzzled looks. "But Winona, why? It's the best thing going on right now," questioned Betsy.

Winona looked at them, seeming a little down. "Well, you'll never guess who came to dinner here last night. Mr. Lester."

Betsy had an unsettled feeling on hearing that bit of news. The last time they'd seen Mr. Lester, when they were leaving the trailer after Teddy had gotten so upset, he hadn't been very pleased with them.

"So, I take it, it didn't go very well," said Betsy.

Winona nodded grimly. "When I got home last night, he was already here, sitting in the parlor with Father. When I walked in the room, Father said, 'oh Mr. Lester, you remember Winona, don't you? She was in the first group to see the dinosaur the other

day, with her friends. Excuse me just a minute. I need to ask my wife a quick question.'

And then Papa left the room, and I was alone with Mr. Lester. At first he just smiled and nodded to me, kind of absently, like he hadn't really seen me. Then I said hello and was all polite and nice, and quiet even, which for me isn't easy, as you know. And then, since we were alone and everything was quiet, he actually looked at me. And I could just see it when he recognized me from the trailer. He wasn't smiling anymore."

"Oh no!" cried Tacy. "Poor you, Winona!"

"Oh yes," said Winona, looking grim. "He knew who I was all right. He said, 'You're the one, the girl who got way too close to Teddy and even held out your hand to him, sending him into such a fury I thought he would break the cage. I wasn't sure I'd be able to show him in this town after that stunt.' He looked so mad at me, and that made me mad, too."

Betsy felt a knot in the pit of her stomach. She was balling up her fists, just listening to this man blame Winona.

"So I was done being all polite and nice. I told him, 'I didn't do anything wrong. I'm a kid -- I was curious. If that dinosaur is as dangerous as you say, then you shouldn't be dragging him all over the country and showing him off, to make a lot of money. If you're so scared of him, don't work with him!'"

"Good for you, Winona!" shouted Tacy, getting riled up.

"Then he said, 'I'm not afraid of him. I just have respect for his power as a wild creature. Just as you children should have respect for your elders, and learn to follow instructions.' Then my father walked back in the room, and we all acted like nothing had happened. I don't know how my parents didn't feel the tension in the room, though. They probably did, but just wanted to act like it was nothing. I was quiet, didn't look at

the man again, and Mama and Papa talked to him politely. I asked to be excused after I ate, and my father made me say goodnight to Mr. Lester. Ugh. I was so glad when he left the house."

"That's awful," said Betsy. "I don't blame you for wanting to stay away from the river front today. I wouldn't want to be around that man anymore either."

"I can't believe he blamed you. You're right," said Tacy. "If that dinosaur is so fragile and touchy, he shouldn't be dragging it all over the place to show people. I can't believe that you're the only one who ever got a little close to the thing." Tacy was indignant for her friend, as was Betsy.

"That dinosaur lives a miserable existence," said Betsy. "He's living in this horrible small cage in a metal trailer. He's trapped and can't hardly even move. Who wants to live like that?"

Winona sighed, and gave them a weak smile. "You two are great friends. It's nice to have you on my side. But hey, if you want to go and hang out down by the river, go ahead. I know it's still the biggest deal in town going on now. I'm going to stay home today. Let me know if anything exciting happens."

Betsy smiled and said teasingly, "Oh, for a change, WE'LL be the ones letting you know if there's any news. That's a switch!"

Winona playfully punched her in the arm. Then she waved goodbye and walked up the steps and back inside. Betsy and Tacy stood there a few moments, taking it all in. There was a heaviness now, for the snooty and mean way Mr. Horace B. Lester had treated their friend. They were sure Mr. Lester would lump the two of them in with Winona, if he really looked at them face on. But still, the lure of the exciting crowds and busy energy of the river front beckoned them. They wanted to be there, and they knew

they could have some fun chatting with Herbert and Tom again. It was fun to have something to talk to boys about.

The crowd was even bigger there today, with long lines of people clutching their 50 cents to buy tickets. Mr. Lester had apparently, according to Tom and Herbert, announced that his trailer and show would be leaving Deep Valley the next day, so anyone who really wanted to see the dinosaur would need to see him today. Betsy knew her father was in the crowd somewhere, or maybe he would be there in the afternoon. He had mentioned closing up his shop for a while so he could see the show. Betsy scanned the crowd, her hand shielding her eyes, but she didn't see him.

They weren't standing too close to the trailer, but they could see Mr. Lester bringing groups inside, and then letting them out, and he looked much more harried and hassled than they'd seen him before. His face had tight lines, he was trying to smile but the smile never reached his frustrated eyes. He was brusque with everyone he dealt with, and when a little five-year-old boy asked him a question, his first reaction was to snap an answer, and then he quickly recovered his false composure and continued his answer in a more dignified fashion. Something was getting to him today, that was for sure.

At lunch time, he announced a one-hour break. He had to feed Teddy and get some food himself. Most of the crowd stayed, some having brought sandwiches and other lunch items with them. Picnics were forming all over the grassy knoll of the river front. Betsy and Tacy didn't have a picnic with them, but were not hungry enough yet to go home for lunch, so they sat with Tom and Herbert. They were off to the side, in full view of the back of the trailer, and they could see a very harried Mr. Lester, hustling around to get ready to feed the big dinosaur. A butcher from town had come forth with a

hand cart and it was full of big pieces of meat, looked to be beef and pork. The meat was moist and soft and red, and Mr. Lester brought out a big pitch fork that would help him get the meat into the dinosaur's cage. There were several big and thick locks and chains on the back of the trailer, and Mr. Lester pulled out his huge key ring and started to unlock the locks. He seemed impatient and was muttering to himself as he would try a lock and have to try it two or three times to make it work.

"He is not having a good day," remarked Tom, as he stretched out his legs on the soft green grass.

"He wasn't yesterday, either, and Winona had the misfortune of coming home and finding that her parents had invited him to dinner," said Betsy. "He remembered her being in the first group to see the show, and he blamed her for making the dinosaur get over excited and out of control."

"You're kidding me," whistled Herbert. "Like that dinosaur is ever really in control."

"Well, Mr. Lester sure isn't in control," said Tacy. "He isn't in control of his emotions, especially not today."

At last, Mr. Lester got all the locks and chains undone, and he pushed the meat cart close up to the edge of the trailer. Mr. Lester stepped inside, grabbed the pitchfork with a huge chunk of meat on it, and then they heard a crash. It sounded like metal tearing and screeching, and there was a loud shout underneath it all.

Herbert stood up abruptly. "I'm going to go see what's happening. I'll be right back." He ran off.

Tacy called after him, "be careful, Herbert!" She looked worried.

As the metal screech and the loud roar of the dinosaur hit the open air, they all started to look uneasy. "Maybe we'd better get up, just in case," said Tom. He didn't need to say the rest: just in case they needed to run.

The loud noises continued and the crowd got silent, everyone looking toward the back of the trailer. Herbert dashed back like a blurry flash. "You won't believe it! I got as close as I could, as close as I dared, and I saw that the cage inside is tearing apart at the seams! It looks like there are big tears in the metal bars, areas where the metal looks weak, like maybe the dinosaur was chewing away at it. You wouldn't think he could chew through those thick bars, but maybe he did it over time. Now Teddy is pushing against the metal and it's tearing apart and Mr. Lester is in there, trying to throw meat in the little gate that he opens up to feed the big guy. He's shoveling the meat in and trying to get the dinosaur to see it and eat it, but the dinosaur looks wild and is roaring and pushing on the bars, over and over again. Mr. Lester looks frantic. Boy, this is really bad. I think we should get out of here!" Herbert was breathless.

Betsy looked at him with wild eyes. They all had big wide eyes right now. "So you think he's going to break loose? Teddy is going to escape?"

Herbert licked his lips and nodded. "I don't think there's anything Mr. Lester can do to stop him. Teddy is just too big and wild, and he's really fierce. He doesn't care about the meat."

At that moment, they heard the loudest sound of scraping, grating metal roar combined with the tremendous roar of a very angry dinosaur, crashing noises, and the sound of shouting as an undertone, Mr. Lester's shouting, which just couldn't compete with all the extra noise. All of a sudden, the trailer split open and they could see the whole body of Teddy the dinosaur stretching out of the metal ruins around him, the

ruins looking like a sardine can split open, nothing strong at all to hold such a beast. Perhaps the metal bars and metal of the trailer had just given out after so many travels with this monstrous beast. In that moment, they remembered Herbert had just said that they should get out of there, and they should have. Now time seemed to stand still as the whole town's collective heartbeat slowed and thumped loudly. There was no sound from the crowd, just everyone listening in stunned silence as the screeching of metal died down to creaking, rusty-gate sounds, and Mr. Horace B. Lester held up the pitchfork of meat to the dinosaur, shouting at him for everyone to hear, "Teddy, stop it right now! What are you doing, you stupid beast? After all the months I've taken care of you and fed you, carted you around from city to city, and now look at what you've done! You get back in that cage right now, or there'll be no more steak for you!"

But of course, there was no cage for Teddy to get back into. It had come apart, and Teddy sensed his freedom. He growled and snarled with all his teeth showing, at Mr. Lester, who had thrown the meat off the pitch fork and was now holding it up to the towering dinosaur, poised to jab him. Mr. Lester looked delirious, and for a moment it was a standoff between the two of them. The whole crowd watched as Mr. Lester took the first move and ran forward with the pitchfork, jabbing it into the dinosaur's belly, probably hoping to prick the dinosaur into submission. The pitchfork tines did not do more than puncture the skin. There was no blood, but the dinosaur became as enraged and fierce as his owner. In the blink of an eye, he leaned down with his great toothy head and grabbed the man by his leg, his teeth clamping around them. He lifted Mr. Lester up, and now he was dangling by one leg from the mouth of one of the greatest predators in history. He was shrieking and furious; he had dropped the pitchfork and was swinging his hands at Teddy's chest and little useless arms. "Put me down! Put me

down now!" could be heard screeching forth from Mr. Lester's irate mouth. He didn't seem scared, just furious that something like this was happening to him, and in front of a whole town.

And then, without further ado, the furious dinosaur swung his furious master up into the air. For one brief moment, Mr. Horace B. Lester was airborne, flying up high, twirling in a spiral through the air. And then, as gravity calls us all to do, Mr. Horace B. Lester fell, head first like a fighter plane, straight into the gaping wide mouth of Teddy the dinosaur. Teddy snapped his jaws shut and Mr. Lester's legs could be seen for a moment sticking out of Teddy's closed mouth. The legs gave a last kick and Teddy tossed his head back, opening up his jaw to give a big swallow before chomping his mouth closed. In almost one gulp, Mr. Horace B. Lester was gone, now a meal for the dinosaur who had been his own meal ticket for so long.

Chapter 4: Dinosaur vs. Deep Valley

The crowd was all on its feet now, silent and dumbfounded during the whole spectacle, until Mr. Lester disappeared into the cavernous, tooth-filled gaping mouth, and then there was a collective gasp. There was a moment of complete astonishment, a wave of shock that rolled over everyone and through everyone like a hurricane wind, and then Teddy finished his chewing and roared a mighty roar of victory. If his little arms had been long enough, he might have pounded his chest like King Kong. And with that roar, the crowd of Deep Valley awoke, snapped awake from the shock, and now the screaming started. There were low, deep voiced screams and high-pitched squeals and shrieks, and now the running away, the getting out of there, as Herbert had advised them to do. Teddy the T. rex started to stumble and step out of the encasings of the trailer and his cage and people started to realize the great danger that they were all in. People started running every which way, knocking into each other, falling over, getting back up. It was not quite a stampede since there was a lot of space, so no one actually got trampled. But it was complete chaos, and now the fate of the town of Deep Valley and its people were unknown.

Herbert and Tom ran one way, and Betsy reached out and firmly grabbed onto Tacy's hand so they wouldn't be separated. Tacy was the faster runner, since she was lighter, but Betsy was usually the leader. They ran together, neither one of them screaming after their first moment of shock, when scream was all they could do in the face of the horrible end of Mr. Horace B. Lester that they'd just witnessed. Their hearts pumping, their legs pounding the ground, they decided in breathless simple sentences to run towards their fathers' businesses in town -- Mr. Ray's Shoe Store, and Mr. Kelly's

dry goods store. They would make sure their fathers knew, and then maybe their fathers would protect them and help them get home. Mr. Kelly's grocery store was the closest, so Betsy and Tacy ran as fast as they could, focused on their task, looking over their shoulders every few seconds, and flying through the streets of downtown Deep Valley.

Many people were still running through the streets, whipping past each other, many of them screaming, some of the too breathless or stunned or shocked to scream at all. Betsy and Tacy turned the corner and got to the store that Mr. Kelly was manager of. The grocery store was dark, and the door was locked shut. Betsy pulled on the door handle hard a few times, but the lock held.

"Come on, let's go to the shoe store," said Tacy, tugging on Betsy's arm nervously.

They took off running again. Mr. Ray's shoe store was a little over two blocks away. It was only just afternoon, but already there was an eerie glow about the streets of downtown. For one thing, many of the shops were dark and closed up. Maybe their owners and shopkeepers had been down at the riverfront to see the dinosaur on the last day, and had just closed their doors then. Some shops were still open, but seemed like they were on the verge of closing, with blinds being pulled and lights being turned off. Some didn't even bother with a "closed" sign being hung in the window. There were no people strolling the wooden sidewalks like any other day, no conversations happening on the corners, no horses leisurely trotting in front of their owners' carriages. Nothing was leisure now. A slight wind was blowing some dried brown leaves down the street. Such a breeze might make them shiver on any other October afternoon, but they were getting plenty warm from running and running and running. The smell in the air was a cold sterile antiseptic smell of fear. Nothing was right just now, nothing was normal, so fear overrode everything. The streets were quiet, with occasional townspeople running

by. They could hear the slapping of feet pounding the packed hard dirt of the streets, or the thumping as they ran across wooden sidewalks. There was also the sound of their own loud breathing in their ears, the thumping of their hearts from exertion and fear. These were the loudest of all.

And then, in the distance, they heard the roar of Teddy, like thunder coming, a warning that you'd better take cover if you have any sense at all. Both Betsy and Tacy looked at each other and gulped. And then squeezed hands tighter and ran faster.

Ray's Shoe Store was just up ahead. Betsy hoped that her father was there, maybe shutting up the shop. She knew it had been his intention to close his shop early and go to see the dinosaur show down by the riverfront. But maybe he hadn't left his shop yet, or maybe he had seen the dinosaur already and come back. Maybe he hadn't heard about the tragedy down by the river, or what was going on. If he wasn't in his shoe store, then Betsy hated to think of where he might be. She didn't want to think of that at all, so she shoved it far back in her mind.

As they closed in on the store, Betsy had a sinking feeling when she saw the darkness of the windows. She knew it in her gut that her father wasn't going to be in his shoe store. And then what? It was a long walk home, and today they would have to run. Could they keep running? They might have to.

When they got to the door, Tacy pulled the brass handle on the wooden door. It stayed firmly shut, and she looked at Betsy bewildered. Betsy frowned. They both were worried, and lines furrowed across their foreheads.

"Let's sit down a minute," said Betsy, her breath coming out in jagged bursts. They had run many blocks since they left the riverfront, and needed to catch their breath if they were going to make it home with any speed. Tacy nodded, breathing hard too, and

they sat down on the edge of the wooden sidewalk, which was raised up several inches from the dirt-packed street.

They waited, they rested, and then they heard more noises coming from the direction they'd just been running from. Up and down the city streets of Deep Valley were rows of shops, many were two-story, some were one-story. Signs hung out in front to catch the eyes of passersby. There were gas-lit street lamps on the corners, and usually the streets were full of life. It was a stimulating, vibrant community. And now, they could see nobody at this moment, but what they heard was loud and certainly made the empty streets seem like less of a ghost town. They heard crashing noises, like explosions of some kind, they heard the large booming of big footsteps, they heard some screaming happening all over again. What they'd thought was the distant rumble, faraway like thunder across the prairie, was now suddenly much closer than they'd thought.

"Oh my gosh," said Tacy. "What do you think is going on now?"

"I, I, don't know," stammered Betsy. She'd had such waves of fear washing over her that day, and now another one bathed her senses in adrenalin.

They looked down the street, still resting on the sidewalk for the moment, gearing themselves up for the moment they'd need to get up and continue running. The necessity of that would come sooner than they thought.

Two blocks down, they saw what they didn't quite expect -- the huge snout of Teddy the T. rex as he ran into view, his powerful legs running faster than they would have guessed for such a big creature. He seemed like he would lumber slowly, not run fast with all his weight and height and size. He was chasing a few small figures, who were running just ahead of him.

Alarmed, Betsy and Tacy turned their heads. He was chasing people now. And then they saw the crashing part. He ran into a lamp post and it fell to the ground, street signs on tall metal posts crumpled as his tail whacked into them. And then he crashed into a small store, the sounds of splintering and grinding and things coming apart, and Teddy roaring again, a deep back-of-the-throat greedy growl. He wanted those people. He was done being fed old meat on a pitchfork; he was done with being locked up in a cage inside a dark trailer, and being hauled around the country, just so one mean man could make a profit. He was done with cages, and now he was free.

People ran past two blocks away, and Teddy crashed into another low building. The bookstore where Betsy and Tacy and Tib had shopped was now a pile of splinters, and Betsy imagined the books trampled by the dinosaur's big chicken-style feet. Betsy gasped. Both she and Tacy stood up simultaneously. Teddy stopped, and instead of following the people down the street that would take him past the shoe store street, perpendicular to where they now sat, Teddy turned his head, once to the left (away from Betsy and Tacy), and then slowly turned his head to the right, so that he was surveying the street and looking straight at them. They stood perfectly still, but even from this distance away, they could see the massive beast's head, and how his eyes took in everything like a good predator, finely tuned to hunt its prey. His nostrils flared, as if he could smell them from the distance of two blocks away. Oh yes, they could tell he definitely smelled them. He paused, they stood stock still, and then he turned his body slowly, so that he was pointing right down the length of the wide empty street. He pointed straight at them.

There was no time to scream. The girls had just recovered their breath, and now they took off running as fast as they possibly could, faster, they knew, than they'd ever run before in their lives. Now they were running for their lives.

They ran at first in the opposite direction, away from the T. Rex, but they realized they needed to have a plan. "Betsy, which way, which way?" cried Tacy, who was able to run a few inches ahead of her friend.

Betsy watched Tacy's black stockinged legs flashing so fast. "Ack, I don't know!" she yelled. "I don't think we can outrun him. He just has to take one step while we run twenty. Let's find a place to hide!"

They kept running and looking all around them. At last they found a narrow space between two tall brick buildings, the two tallest stores in downtown Deep Valley. There was the Lion's Department Store and the less expensive hotel in town, for those who couldn't afford to stay at the Melborn Hotel. Both of these buildings were three stories tall, so it seemed like there would be more protection for them. Betsy saw it first and caught a new burst of speed, grabbing Tacy's arm. She pulled her toward the narrow alley-way between the buildings. "Here, here! Let's go in here!" she whispered loudly.

Teddy had already narrowed the distance between them to just one block instead of two. He saw them disappear and roared, an angry, frustrated roar. Betsy hoped they would be out-of-sight, out-of-mind, and that since he could no longer see them he'd forget all about them, and just run away. Betsy and Tacy crept along the cool brick wall to the safest place, half-way down the alley. They stood there breathing hard again, their breath sounding way too loud in their ears. Tacy held her hand up in front of her mouth. "I can't stop breathing so loud," she said, her blue eyes quivering with fear.

"I know," said Betsy softly, still breathing hard herself. "It's okay. It's going to be okay. We'll be fine. He can't get in here."

The alley was blessedly narrow, just big enough for two girls to stand shoulder to shoulder. Even in the daylight, it was dark and dingy, since only a narrow slice of light could filter down there. Betsy and Tacy stilled their breathing as much as they could. They couldn't hold their breath, but they were as still as they possibly could be, not moving a muscle. They watched the opening, could hear Teddy's slowed-down footsteps, could feel the pounding as the huge beast put all his tons of weight down with each step forward. Would he continue onward, his small animal brain just too ineffective to remember much?

Ah, but such was not the case. When it came to being a predator and stalking his prey, Teddy was a master of remembering. He looked and made a questioning, groaning gurgle. He sniffed and kept his head low, searching, searching, turning his head this way and that. Perhaps his sense of smell was so developed that he was sniffing them out like a bloodhound. When his big snout finally came into view of the alley-way, he made a loud higher pitched shrieking noise, a "Eureka, I've found you!" kind of yell. His big yellow eyes gleamed at them like burning candles, and he tried to get inside the alley, pushing his head into the opening, stretching and pushing again.

Betsy and Tacy held their breaths, waiting for the worst. But the alley was way too narrow for Teddy to get to them.

"Oh no!" shrieked Tacy. "Betsy, what are we going to do?" She was grabbing onto Betsy's sleeve, wringing it in her hands.

Somehow Betsy found a place of inner calm, knowing that she needed to be composed to help out her friend. Both of them panicking just wouldn't be good. Betsy took some deep breaths and slowed down everything, her breathing, her pounding heart, her adrenaline-soaked body.

"It's okay, Tacy. He can't get us here," she said, though both of them secretly knew that they really didn't know anything. Teddy just might be able to get them, but thinking about that now wouldn't help. "We're between these two strong and tall buildings. We're safe."

Tacy closed her eyes, and Betsy could see that she was trying to calm herself too. She nodded her head and took deep breaths. In a few minutes, she said, "Okay. Do you think we just wait here, then?"

"Unfortunately, I don't think there's anything else we can do. Can you think of anything? I think we're going to have to wait a while, so we'll have time to think."

Tacy said, "Well, we're certainly good at making up stories and using our imaginations. So maybe we'll think of something, an invention, a plan, something." She gave a little brave smile. The idea of planning and imagining always cheered them up.

Betsy hoped the dinosaur would just get bored and wander away, maybe in a few minutes even. How long of an attention span can an overgrown lizard have, anyway? Betsy and Tacy found a dry spot on the brick pavement underneath them and leaned back against one wall.

The answer was, unfortunately, quite a while. A dinosaur who is stalking his prey and has been cooped up in a cage for months and months, if not years, can have a very long attention span. Teddy stayed at the entrance to the alley where Betsy and Tacy had

gone in, and kept looking in at them, like bugs in a jar, trying to push his nose in to get at them. Fortunately, they were many feet out of his reach. It was rather unnerving to have this big creature stalking you, salivating over you, wanting to eat you so bad. He tried several different approaches to get to them. First he tried walking away, and Betsy and Tacy breathed a premature sigh of relief. He was gone for 10 minutes, and they could hear him pounding and thundering around, his footsteps still nearby. At one point, they couldn't hear him and thought he might have gone on, but then they started hearing the big bass drum of his steps and were surprised to hear them coming from the other end of the building, by the other entrance to the alley. Within a moment, he was peering his big yellow eyes in at them from down there, and gave a loud shriek when he saw them, another "aha, I've found you again!" moment.

Betsy and Tacy looked at each other and gulped. Maybe they were dealing with a much smarter beast than they realized. He pushed his nose in further, but his head was thankfully, definitely too big. His next strategy was to take the side of his massive body and heave it at the opening. He was trying to use his blunt force, his weight and strength, to knock down buildings so he could reach them. He had already done this with smaller stores, especially those made out of wood; those were easy for him to demolish, with just a wave of his strong tail. There was a lot in this town that a dinosaur like him could destroy. But Betsy was counting on the fact that the Lion's Department Store and Reed's Hotel, two taller, brick built buildings in town, would stand up to the punishment of one T. rex.

He pushed at the building and then started to back up and run at it. Betsy and Tacy could feel the pounding as his feet hit the ground faster, they could feel as he

collided with the buildings, and then they could hear the smash as he crashed his weight against the building, bricks flying off and hitting the ground.

"What if he knocks down the building?" whispered Tacy frantically. She and Betsy were huddling together like frightened little mice in a nest.

"I... I... don't know," said Betsy. Now she was getting as scared as Tacy too, for her imagination had taken over and she could imagine the buildings crumbling and she and Tacy would be exposed, much like Teddy was when he had broken out of that cage and trailer. They would be surrounded by piles of rubble from the collapse of the buildings, and Teddy would be such a good predator that he'd use his big fat snout to find them amidst all the bricks and debris. He would dig them out and eat them up in a gulp, like he'd done to Mr. Horace B. Lester. (It was weird to think that Mr. Lester was actually inside Teddy now, still surely being digested.) They'd be gone, and their families would never know what became of them. It was a terrifying thought.

"Oh Betsy," said Tacy, hugging her friend. It lessened her fear to see her friend's same terror. Betsy had been calming her down, and now it was her turn to take the strong position. "I don't think he can. He can knock a few bricks down, but these two buildings are probably some of the strongest ones in town. I think we're safe. He can't get us."

"I don't want to be a dinosaur meal," wailed Betsy, now letting her big fears come out. "I don't want to never see our families again! I don't want them to never know what happened to us, because no one will know that he's eaten us." Betsy paused, her mind taking a creative leap. "And I don't want to be inside Teddy's stomach with that Mr. Lester. That would be an awful thing to know, that I died that way and was ground up and digested with that awful man!"

"Oh gosh, I hadn't thought of that! That would be awful!" said Tacy. And for some reason, maybe just being in this awful and ridiculous situation, they both started to laugh. They first started with giggles, pictures in their head of the absurdity of the situation they were in, and then they started to howl with laughter, bending over and tears pouring down their faces. One of them would start to quiet down, and then the other would laugh even harder and they would both be laughing again. It was just the release they needed after the horrible tragedies of this day. They laughed even as the buildings shook with Teddy's attempts to knock down the building. And gradually, they both subsided and grew calm, wiping their eyes on their sleeves.

Time passed... it was starting to get dark now. It was autumn and got dark much earlier in the evening than it did in the summer. Betsy and Tacy shifted their weight on the ground where they still sat. They'd now been in this alley a few hours, and the brick ground was getting hard and they were getting stiff. "Let's stand up and do some calisthenics," said Tacy.

"Good idea," said Betsy." She stood up and stretched out her legs. Tacy led the way, coaching them to do arm circles, jumping jacks, burpees, push-ups, pretend jumping rope, running in place, and toe touches. They'd been getting cold as they sat for so long. As the sun went down the warmth of the afternoon faded, bringing cool night. It might get cold. Doing calisthenics kept them warm, got their blood pumping. It also just made them feel better.

Unfortunately, jumping around did stir up Teddy's attention. He'd gone away for a little while, an hour maybe, and Betsy and Tacy had quietly discussed what their options might be. How would they get out of this mess? What would they do? They couldn't stay trapped in between two buildings forever. But when would it be safe to leave? How

would they know he wasn't just lying in wait for them around the corner? They would never have thought an old dinosaur capable of such strategy before, but this guy had seemed pretty clever so far.

Teddy was back with his snout and his beaming yellow eyes once they started to jump around in the alley. He cackled and roared, letting them know he was still waiting for them. And then, after they'd settled down again, they heard him stumbling away, crashing into smaller buildings, roaring, pounding the ground.

Betsy and Tacy sat quietly listening. They were hearing other alarming noises now too, like sounds of destruction, crashing noises, further away in town. They heard more roars and growls, more than just what Teddy would make. What was going on? Were other dinosaurs entering town now too? What was happening to Deep Valley now? And more importantly, what was happening to the people of Deep Valley?

"I'm scared again," admitted Tacy. They'd worked so hard to get themselves away from being just terrified. That was no way to survive.

"Me too," said Betsy, solemnly. "But we can't think about that now, what's going on out there. We don't know, and thinking about that won't help. We need to think about ourselves and how we're going to handle this situation. Our families would want us to take care of ourselves."

"You don't think they're...?" Tacy gulped, not able to say the words.

"No, of course they're not," said Betsy. She was sure of this in her heart, and she needed to cling to this belief. "I know they're fine. Our parents are smart and resourceful and they will know what to do. That's how come we can do it too, take care of ourselves. Because we learned it from them." Betsy was firm and certain in her words.

"That's true, they did," said Tacy. "And we can do it too. I know it too, Betsy."

From there, they formulated their plan: they would stay in the shelter of the two buildings until morning, when they would have light and a clear vision of the situation they'd be going out into. Hopefully the dinosaurs would be onto some other place by then, but at least they'd be able to see them clearly. The girls would stealthily and cautiously make their way along the streets of downtown, cut through Lincoln Park and then head to their family homes. Then their families would rejoice and Betsy and Tacy would be in the protection and care of their parents, which would be a relief. Taking care of themselves like this was rather stressful!

It was an incredibly long night. It was dark and cold and the brick in the alley was getting extremely uncomfortable. They tried lying down and using their arms as head rests, and that worked a little bit but it was still difficult. They slept fitfully, one or the other of them waking with a start, or rolling over repeatedly, trying to find a more comfortable position. There wasn't one. At one point, in the coldest darkest part of the night, Betsy lay awake wondering if the night would ever end. No night had ever seemed so long, not even when she'd sat up with Hugo that one night that seemed so long ago, though it was only a few months.

There was a loud crash in the middle of the night at one point, that made both Betsy and Tacy sit up, startled and wide-eyed. It sounded like it came from a few blocks away, as if a huge boulder had been thrown. They had no idea what would make such a noise. It didn't sound like Teddy's usual antics of crashing buildings and roaring. It took a while for them to calm down after that and go back to some kind of jumbled up, restless sleep. They no longer even bothered asking each other what they thought it could be. There was no point.

And then the sky started to get lighter. They could tell this even though they were only getting a sliver of the sky hidden between these two buildings. There was a paleness, and then a pinkness, and both Betsy and Tacy were awake now, bleary-eyed and yawning. How could you rest knowing you might still be being stalked, and lying on such hard ground outside? They waited for dawn and daylight together, hugging to warm each other up, too exhausted to speak.

They waited as patiently as they could, but it wasn't easy. For one thing, they were starving by now. They'd had a big breakfast the morning before, but that had been the last of the food they'd eaten. Being cold and hungry was extra hard. As the sunlight glinted off of windows in the building across the street, they knew it was time. They stood up and looked at each other, two disheveled 12-year-old girls, hair messed up, smudges of dirt on their faces and hands, clothing crumpled. Betsy reached out for Tacy's hand, and then silently and softly crept down the alley to the end closest to home. The light hit them right in the eyes and they had to blink, it was so bright after their long night in the cave of the alley. When they got to the entrance, they stuck their heads out, searching back and forth and up and down for any danger that might be lurking. But what they saw wasn't danger really, it was destruction. And even with all the noises they'd heard in the night, they hadn't been prepared to see what had happened to Deep Valley.

For several hours, there had been no sounds, which had been both comforting and eerie. No sounds, what exactly did that mean? In the dark of night, they had no way of knowing. But in daylight, they weren't sure yet.

First of all, the streets of downtown Deep Valley looked like a ghost town. There was nobody of animal or human variety in sight. Betsy had never seen downtown like

this. It always seemed like the busiest place before, even when her family had taken her there in the evening. There were always horses and carriages and people on foot or on horse, groups and individuals. And in recent years, there were dinosaurs to see there too, always in the company of a man, always subdued and trained in some way. But even after a big blizzard, there was always someone going somewhere, doing something in downtown.

What made it seem even more eerie was the sight of buildings smashed, banged up, some just piles of rubble. Had Teddy done all this? It must've been the noises they heard last night, and other dinosaurs involved as well, since they had heard more than just Teddy last night.

"Oh no," whispered Tacy, for they were still being cautious. "What has happened to our beautiful town?"

Betsy shook her head. Her heart was very heavy. "Why did that Mr. Horace B. Lester ever have to come to Deep Valley? We were fine before he and his dinosaur showed up. Now look at it."

They crept out from the protection of the alley now, stepping onto the wooden sidewalk, and slowly walking into the street. The town looked like some little toy that had gotten stepped on. "Oh no," said Betsy. "Look at the bakery!"

The whole front of the bakery down the street was gone, leaving just three sides of the wooden building standing. Betsy and Tacy approached it. "Do you think we could get some bread or some rolls?" asked Tacy. "I'm so hungry. I know we'll be home soon, but it sure would be good to have a little something now. But that would be stealing, wouldn't it?"

Betsy said firmly, "I think we're beyond the idea of stealing, Tacy. We need to survive, and nobody is going to want to buy the bread that's sitting in a smashed-up building. We do need that bread."

Tacy nodded. She didn't like to think that they were into survival mode, but she knew it wouldn't do anyone any good if they didn't take care of themselves. They carefully walked among the remains of the bakery, the broken bits on the floor, glass and wood and brick. Some shelves behind the counter still remained with loaves of bread and rolls sitting on them. Betsy and Tacy quickly filled their pockets with rolls, and each of them took a loaf of bread. "You never know," said Betsy. "If we don't need all this ourselves, our families sure might need them. We just don't know."

The bread tasted good, a little stale but still soft and yeasty. They said a silent thank you to the baker who baked the bread, and hoped he was safe somewhere. They ate as they walked down the street toward Lincoln Park, still looking around every which way, their ears and eyes on high alert. If one of them stepped on a piece of wood or glass in the street, they would both jump.

The rest of the town looked the same, as far as they could tell. Were people hidden in their houses, had they spent the night listening to dinosaurs invade the town and smash everything up? Or had the town been abandoned? The two girls only barely let themselves think this thought; it was too terrifying to think they were somehow all alone in their beloved Deep Valley.

When they reached Lincoln Park, that pie-shaped park where they'd played so many times, they saw a tree toppled down on the ground. It almost looked like a storm had blown through or a tornado. But there was a big foot print next to the tree, a bigger rounder footprint than Teddy's big claw-like foot. Betsy stepped her own foot into the

huge footprint, and Tacy just said, "Wow." It was hard to believe there was anything that big on the earth, any animal at all.

They turned now to the residential area of town, where the citizens of Deep Valley lived. Here were all the familiar and colorful houses that Betsy and Tacy had known all their lives, some with porches, some Victorians, some bungalows or cottage style, some colonial. All these different houses came together to make a whole beautiful town.

But oh, how hard was it to see the destruction here, even harder than it was to see downtown. Here were homes of people they knew and loved, and several of them smashed to smithereens, or half-standing, or banged up. Some were blessedly still intact. Betsy and Tacy kept saying, "oh no! Not so-and-so's house, not so-and-so's!" It was heartbreaking, and frightening, because here as downtown, there was no sign of life. Everyone was gone, it seemed. Which made their hearts very heavy, and filled with more worry about what they would discover of their own houses.

"What if our families aren't there, Betsy?" asked Tacy, forming the words of a reality they were afraid to face.

"No, it can't be," said Betsy stubbornly. "Our mamas and papas are waiting for us. They have to be. Our houses will be fine."

But the more they saw, the less confidence they felt in that wishful thinking of Betsy's. They kept thinking, it couldn't be, it couldn't be, it couldn't be.

They turned down Hill Street, silently surveying the three houses in a row that were smashed. They looked to the Big Hill and felt a little courage that at least THAT was still there. How dinosaurs would destroy a hill, they weren't sure, but at this point, almost anything awful seemed possible.

As they walked on, they were immensely relieved to see that the last several houses on Hill Street were still completely standing. Even the bench that they'd sat on and eaten supper on so many times was still there. Hill Street just wouldn't have seemed the same without it. And their own houses looked the same as ever. "Oh, it's a good sign," said Tacy.

As they approached their houses, they decided that they would stick together, and first go to Tacy's house to see the situation. Splitting up was going to be too hard. As far as they knew right now, they only had the two of them. They needed each other too much, and what if something bad had happened to either of their families? Or what if something dangerous was lurking, or someone? No, much better to stay together, even though both of them were so anxious about their families.

The problem was, they could tell right off that the houses were too quiet, just like the whole town. They held hands as they climbed the wooden step to Tacy's house. The door had been left a little ajar, which was not like Tacy's family at all. The door creaked as Tacy pushed it open. "Hello?" she called softly. "Mama? Papa? Katie? Paul? Anyone?"

There was no one there. The house was completely empty of any person, and it looked like her family members had left in a hurry. There were plates of half-finished lunch left on the table. Mrs. Kelly would've never put up with something like that in her house. The coat closet was wide open, and some of the summer coats had fallen to the floor, but all the warmer coats were gone. A silverware drawer in the kitchen was pulled all the way out, and there was a bucket of old dirty water sitting on the floor in the kitchen. Betsy and Tacy looked around quietly, keeping as silent as they could to match the house. Betsy turned to Tacy and saw her wiping her eyes with the back of her hand. She put her arm around her friend.

"I'm sure they're all fine," she said it to Tacy, but just as much to herself. "They obviously had to leave in a hurry. None of these houses were damaged, so they weren't hurt by the dinosaurs. They were running to protect themselves, and knowing your papa and mama, they did protect themselves."

"But where are they?" said Tacy in a small voice. "It looks like they just disappeared."

"I wish I knew," said Betsy. "But now we'll just have to protect ourselves, like they've been protecting themselves. We know how to do it because we learned it from them."

Betsy felt a lump in her throat as they turned to leave. They would go over to Betsy's little yellow cottage now. She almost didn't even need to walk into the house to know that her family wouldn't be there.

But they had to do it, had to see it, just in case there were some clues over there, some hint of what had happened. It was awful not knowing anything. It was eerie and strange to see their houses standing empty.

"Are you ready?" asked Tacy. Betsy nodded solemnly. They crossed the street hand in hand, as they had so many times before, usually much happier than they were now. They climbed the cement steps up to the front door. Their door was not open like Tacy's house had been, but it was unlocked and the girls went in. Betsy didn't even bother calling out. The rooms of the house were so still, they knew already that nobody was home here. The walls seemed like they were holding a secret, but couldn't tell it. Like Tacy's house, this house had the look of a sudden evacuation. Items were scattered about, food left on the table (so it looked like it had happened around dinner time yesterday), the bones of a chicken, a bowl of gravy, some boiled carrots in a serving dish.

Plates with food on them were still on the table. The coat closet revealed that heavy coats had been grabbed at the last minute, and all the coats except Betsy's were gone. Upstairs, some of the beds were still made except a few blankets and pillows were missing, so it looked like her family had known it would need to have something to sleep with. This made Betsy feel better. They would have something they needed with them, and would be able to keep warm.

In the kitchen, some food had been taken, apples and some cookies and the raisin jar was open and half empty. And then, on the kitchen counter, Betsy found a scrap of paper with a pencil next to it. She came closer, called to Tacy who was also looking around closely at everything. It was her mother's handwriting, and all the note said was, "Betsy, we --." "Oh no," said Betsy. "We what, Mama? We what?" Tears formed in her eyes.

"They must've really been in a hurry to leave," said Tacy softly, consoling her friend. "She wanted to write something to you but couldn't."

Betsy felt so sad but also so grateful that her family had thought of her, had wanted to tell her what was going on, but that they'd needed to take care of their own safety, just like she and Tacy had. She was glad her family hadn't sacrificed themselves to try to get a message to her. That wasn't so important. She wanted them to be safe more than anything.

Betsy took the scrap of paper and folded it up in her pocket. It was comforting to have it. Now she and Tacy turned away, looking around the house, absorbing the quiet of the whole town. For quiet, it actually seemed quite loud to them, so much louder than the usual background buzz of daily life.

Betsy and Tacy turned to each other in the parlor of Betsy's house, next to the armchair and foot stool where Mr. Ray liked to sit. They were both thinking it, but it was Tacy who said it. "Now what?"

"Let's sit down a minute and think. It doesn't seem like we're in any danger right now, so we might as well take the time to think about it," said Betsy, and the girls both went to sit on the parlor sofa.

They sat with their heads bowed at first, their mood subdued, and their posture was a silent way of seeking help from whatever forces in the Heavens could help them. They breathed deeply, trying to focus their minds despite such heavy hearts and uncertainty. Betsy's mind raced at first, anxious with possibilities, what-ifs, terrible stories her mind wanted to make up, like maybe everyone in the town was eaten by dinosaurs. She knew it wasn't likely, since there'd have to be a whole lot of dinosaurs to eat a whole town. But that was the kind of direction her mind was going in. She knew she'd need to think clearly, to think whatever plan they came up with all the way through, and to be smart. They were only 12, but that was practically grown up. There was a lot they could do. Especially if they were put in a position of needing to do it. They could do it, and they would. Of that she was certain.

So, what was there to do? What possibilities were there for two girls, when they didn't know what had become of their families and their town? "Let's brainstorm," said Betsy. They had learned brainstorming in school, and it seemed like a good way of getting their minds to think of many possibilities. "Remember, no idea is stupid. We just need to think of anything, even if it doesn't seem like it will work at first."

"Well, we could just stay here," said Tacy. "That's an option."

"Oh wait a minute, let me go get one of my notebooks to write these down in. We're going to want to look at all our options," said Betsy. She was gone in a flash, up the stairs, to the cigar box in her bedroom on her dresser that held her notebooks (the cover stated "Wear Queen Quality Shoes," from Papa's shoe store) and pencils. She fished out an empty notebook and a pencil and was down the stairs in a flash, back to the sofa in the parlor. "Okay," she said, opening the notebook and holding onto her pencil. "Stay here." She wrote that down.

"We could search the town for people. Someone might be here somewhere," said Tacy.

"We could leave town and go somewhere else."

"We could go to the next town to see if there's any news of what happened in Deep Valley, and we could see if they've had any problems. We could go to St. Peter," said Tacy.

"Or Murmuring Lake," suggested Betsy.

"We could walk all the way to Minneapolis," said Tacy. "We could go to the newspaper office and tell them what happened in Deep Valley, and maybe they'd have some news."

The ideas were getting bigger and more exciting as they went. The idea of going to Minneapolis seemed extreme, and so far away. But they were getting some confidence in their abilities as independent and strong girls, who could maybe do anything they wanted.

"We could go to Milwaukee!" said Betsy.

"Oh!" said Tacy, with sudden excitement. "Tib's father works for Dino Control Patrol. He might be able to help us. He might know something about towns ravaged by dinosaurs."

"That's brilliant!" said Betsy, excited now too. "It might be a long way to go, but we actually know someone there, and Mr. Mueller might really be in a position to help us."

No more ideas came for them, so they sat a moment, looking over Betsy's list (Betsy loved to make lists, although this kind of tragedy-inspired list was not her favorite). "If we stay here, we might be waiting and waiting and nothing would happen. We'd be alone and we might not know what happened to our town."

"And the dinosaurs could come back. Teddy might come back here," said Tacy, with a gulp.

"And I don't think we'd be as safe in our houses as we were in between those two tall buildings in downtown. It looked like the dinosaurs were able to smash houses if they wanted to," said Betsy. "I don't think staying here is a good option." She crossed the first item off their list.

"Minneapolis might be okay, but we don't know anyone there. I like the idea of Milwaukee better. It's farther away but we'd know Tib. I'm sure her parents would let us stay with them. And Mr. Mueller might be able to help."

"Yes," said Betsy, circling the last item on the list. "That's my favorite idea too."

"But how do we do it?" asked Tacy. "How do we get there? What do we take?"

Betsy turned the page and started a new list. She titled it, "Going to Milwaukee."

"Do you remember when we were little, and we played in the buggy one day and made up that song about going to Milwaukee?" said Tacy with a smile.

"Oh yeah," said Betsy, chuckling as she remembered. They'd been five years old, had just heard about the city of Milwaukee. They hadn't met Tib yet, but had heard that the family in the chocolate-colored house were away in Milwaukee, and it had sounded so exotic and foreign to them. They'd pretended they were in a buggy going to Milwaukee. "Gosh, how did that song go?"

Tacy started singing, "There's a place named Milwaukee, Milwaukee..."

Betsy joined in, "Milwaukee, Milwauk, Milwauk-EE. There's a place named Milwaukee, Milwaukee..."

They were remembering it all now and sang loudly, "A beautiful place to be; I wish I could go to Milwaukee..."

Then Betsy sang this line alone: "With Tacy ahold of my hand," and they clasped their hands and held them high.

Then both continued: "I wish I could go to Milwaukee, it sounds like the Beulah Land."

They fell back on the parlor sofa and laughed, the silly little song standing out so oddly from the situation they were finding themselves in. They laughed until they cried, wiping tears away, remembering their sweet little 5-year-old selves, and remembering how Betsy always liked to make up poems and songs, how they played pretend so well together, and how they fell in love with the idea of Milwaukee, and had never been there, only heard about it from Tib.

Tacy cleared her throat. "At least we'll have a song for the trip."

Betsy smiled. These were good memories. They'd need to take their good memories with them on the trip, to cheer them up and keep them going. She wrote down, "To bring: Good memories."

They worked on their new list, brainstorming for the next hour on what they would need. They came up with: food, bags to carry everything, warm coats and hats and scarves and mittens, extra shoes, water, money, notebooks and pencils, one book (they decided on one volume from Shakespeare's complete works, with three plays and all the sonnets in tiny print), a comb and mirror, and each of them would take a very small photo of their family with them. That was not only for courage and comfort, but they might need to show someone along their journey what their family looked like, if they were searching for what happened to them.

"And how will we know how to get there?" asked Tacy.

"Papa has a map book, that will help us. It's not too big, so I think we need to make room for it."

"I think we have a compass at my house, but I'm not sure I know how to use it," said Tacy.

"I think I remember how. Papa brought one along on picnics sometimes. Let's bring it."

When they couldn't think of anything else, they went about the task of collecting all the items from searching through both their houses. They were able to come up with more than enough of what they needed. They worked on how they would carry it all, with some bags of Tacy's brothers that you could strap onto your back. The brothers also had some water flasks from times they went camping. It was a lot of stuff, but especially since they could carry so much of it on their backs, the girls thought they'd be okay.

They came back together in Betsy's house to make decisions about how it would all go. They piled all the stuff on Betsy's front porch, then cleaned off the dining room table, with the half-eaten meal still sitting there, so they could sit and work and eat there.

Their plan was to have some dinner, stay the night in Betsy's house because it would be too hard to start off on such a long journey in the night. They would hopefully have a good night's sleep, after the poor night of sleep they'd had in the alley the previous night. They would sleep on the sofa so they would be more aware of their surroundings and able to hear if anything bad was going on. They would get going the next morning after a good breakfast.

After cleaning the table, they made their own dinner of food they found in Mrs. Ray's pantry and refrigerator, meat and cheese sandwiches, apples and cookies. There was still fresh milk to drink, so they had that too. They got out the map book and compass, and studied the route and direction they would need to take to get to Milwaukee.

"We need to go East and South," said Betsy. She wrote out notes from studying the map, like what cities they would pass through and what roads they could take to get there. "It's about 360 miles to get there. I don't know how long that will take to walk."

"Well, if we walk 10 miles a day," figured Tacy, "then it will take us 36 days. If we walk 20 miles a day, it will take us 18 days."

"Wow, that sounds like a lot," said Betsy.

"Yeah, but we can do it," said Tacy. "We don't know what will happen along the way, but we'll make it somehow. I know we will."

"Okay, I'll be positive too, then. We can do it!" said Betsy, giving her fist a pound on the table.

It was time for bed. They were both exhausted after the long and strange few days they'd been having. It was time to camp out on the couch, to at least have a soft place to sleep, maybe for the last time in a long time.

They slept like logs, with strange dreams, but always with one ear tuned to anything they might need to be alerted to. Luckily there was nothing, so they woke up refreshed and rested, and a little apprehensive and excited. It was a Betsy-Tacy adventure, which were always fun, but this one had too many unknowns and tragic circumstances surrounding it. But they would do what they needed to do.

For now, the girls ate their breakfast of eggs and toast, and then packed their bundles and headed out the door. Betsy turned to take one look at her family home, hoped she would see her family there again one day soon, for more happy memory making. But now it was time to go.

Chapter 5: The Journey Begins

Betsy and Tacy passed through the center of Deep Valley solemnly and steadily. They put their heads down and just kept going, trying to forget all the destruction and horrible chaos they had already seen. They were soldiers grimly doing their duty, heavy packs on their backs. They had a job to do and they would do it, so they tried not to engage their emotions as they trudged through town. They knew things would get easier once they got out of Deep Valley. They might actually be able to enjoy their adventure. They hoped they would enjoy it some, at least, even if it was hard. It was going to be a long one, either way.

It was a cool and crisp day. They didn't need to wear their warmest winter coats, since the sun was shining. That helped cheer their mood. It felt good to be walking together, step after step. Once they got out into the country, beyond Deep Valley's boundaries, they walked along fall forests and harvested farmlands. They didn't see anyone at all, and they walked in the middle of the road, just because they could. At first they talked, and then they sang. Betsy and Tacy had always liked singing, and Julia turned it almost into a religion in the Ray household, with her piano playing and opera music scores, all the time. They sang popular songs that Julia had taught them when she played the piano. They sang the Cat Duet, which they'd sung every year since they were 5-years-old for school performances or talent shows. That song always made them laugh. And they sang the Milwaukee song from their childhood too, the one Betsy had made up in the buggy, and the one they'd remembered just this afternoon. They sang loudly, and with gusto.

"Can you imagine if our 5-year-old selves had guessed we would one day be walking to Milwaukee?" said Tacy. "They would have been so excited."

"Oh yes," said Betsy. "And they are a part of this journey with us. We take them with us. And together we'll get to see what Milwaukee is all about."

"Tib likes it," said Tacy. "And that's good enough for me."

"Tib!" said Betsy. "It will be so good to see her, won't it? Not only will we get to see Milwaukee, and hopefully get help for Deep Valley, but we'll get to see Tib again."

"She'll sure be surprised that we walked the whole way there, won't she?" said Tacy.

"Maybe she'll be surprised for a minute, but you never know with Tib. She might just ask why we hadn't walked to her place yet before, or she might think it was something normal to do and just shrug."

"That reminds me," said Tacy. "We haven't had to say, 'Isn't that just like Tib?' in so long now. We'll get to say that once we get there, I'll bet. Unless she's changed."

"Oh posh, Tib hasn't changed," said Betsy. "That's just the way Tib is. I don't think she can change that much."

"I don't know," said Tacy, disagreeing almost just to make the conversation more interesting. "Going to Milwaukee could change a person. Maybe we'll be changed too."

"I'll be Dark and Mysterious," Betsy said dramatically. It was something she'd thought about a little. How would she change if she could? Maybe Milwaukee would change her, and she could be someone more like Julia around the boys.

Tacy knew Betsy liked to think about boys a little, but neither of them had a crush of any kind on any boy. They just liked how fun it was to talk with some boys, like Herbert and Tom. The teasing banter was fun.

"I won't change at all," declared Tacy. "Milwaukee won't change me at all."

"Well, you don't need to change, Tacy. You're perfect just the way you are," said Betsy, and she meant it.

"I wish you could see that about yourself too, Betsy," said Tacy, reaching out to squeeze her friend's arm. "Because it's true of you too. You don't need to change anything, and you're perfect the way you are now."

"But my hair is so straight!" wailed Betsy. "And my teeth are parted in the middle. And... and..."

"And nothing," said Tacy. "That's all apart of you, and you don't need to change it. Really."

"Oh, okay," grumped Betsy. She knew Tacy was right, that she should just accept the way she was and love herself for it. And for the most part, she did have a really good self-esteem. After all, she'd been raised in a loving family with supportive parents who adored her, who encouraged Julia in her desire to become an opera singer, and supported Betsy in her desire to become a writer. Not all parents were like this, especially not with their daughters, maybe only their sons. Betsy liked to be herself, to laugh, to talk about being a writer. It was mostly some of the physical things that she wasn't happy about.

But she knew that she and Tacy were about to undergo a change, too. They were 12-years-old, which meant they were almost teenagers, they were almost into puberty, which her mother had talked to her about last year. Their bodies would start to grow and be curvy and become more womanly, which was hard to believe. It had happened to Julia, at least the beginnings of it had started for her already, so Betsy knew it was just around the corner. It was an exciting and scary idea itself, kind of like this journey to

Milwaukee. Betsy and Tacy had had a fun childhood, but now they were eager (at least Betsy was) to see what the next stage would be like.

As it grew towards noon, the girls' conversation petered out and they just walked, each thinking their own thoughts. It was pleasant to talk, and pleasant to not have to talk. After a while, they stopped for water and a little food. They knew they needed to make the food last, so they weren't trying to eat too much at any one time. They sat on the side of the road, an impromptu and not totally cheerful Betsy-Tacy picnic. They had water to drink, no cocoa, and that would have to do for now. There was no other way to really carry liquids, and they only had the flasks they had borrowed from Tacy's older brothers' stash. They were grateful to have them.

"Where do you think we'll get more water when we've drunk all this stuff up?" asked Tacy.

"Don't worry," said Betsy. "There will be towns along the way, and streams we can drink from too. We won't run out."

"Oh, yeah," said Tacy, remembering. It was easy to just get afraid and not think of the solutions, but if she was going to be part of Team Betsy and Tacy, then she'd have to feel her anxiety, let it go, and then think it through like she'd have to if she were on her own. "Same with food, too."

Betsy and Tacy had never been out of the confines of Deep Valley without an adult, just the two of them. The world seemed like such a big place when you walked through it, with just a friend, not riding in a buggy or a surrey.

At first, they were not stopping hardly at all, just for a picnic meal, and then it was up again and walking, no stopping, just keep going forward to their goal. But in the afternoon, they realized that they wouldn't be doing themselves any good if they got

exhausted, if their feet got too sore, if they couldn't walk anymore because they just couldn't take another step forward. This was a journey, and it was going to be a long one, so they might as well enjoy it, take the time they needed, and then they would be in good shape to keep going forward to their goal.

So in mid-afternoon, they took a rest on a hilly spot of prairie, sitting among the tall dry pale straw grasses while they stretched their legs and rested their feet. They lay back and looked up at the sky.

Late in the day, they reached Murmuring Lake. It happened to be on the way they'd figured to go to Milwaukee. They stopped to eat their dinner there, a few pieces of meat, bread and cheese. They thought it was best to eat up the perishable items first, and the meat was the most perishable item they had.

"I wonder where we'll get food when our supply runs out?" said Betsy, thinking out loud.

"Well, we'll probably be able to buy some in towns as we go," said Tacy, for they had taken all the money they could find in their houses. They wished they hadn't had to raid their parents' stash of money, but they knew their parents would want them to take care of themselves and survive, so they'd said a quiet thank you as they took it. "And otherwise, we probably shouldn't worry about it. We're on an adventure, and we have no idea what will be around the corner. We'll just have to take it as it comes. There are possibilities we can't even imagine right now."

"You're right, of course," sighed Betsy. "This is an adventure into the unknown. Why, we don't even know what other cities outside of Deep Valley are really like. We're certainly going to learn a lot."

They settled down by the lake, the shimmering waters of Murmuring Lake, where Betsy's family had come every summer ever since Betsy could remember. Tacy had come out to visit there a few times, so they both knew it well. It was much quieter late in the fall, none of the antics of summer play, of swimmers and boaters and fishers using the lake for entertainment. Betsy loved it here, but it was a reminder of carefree times, and they seemed far away from those times right now. It was bittersweet to sit here now.

And strange to see the whole lake so quiet now. So far, Betsy and Tacy hadn't run into a single person on their journey. In fact, they hadn't really seen any people since Herbert and Tom had dashed away the day before yesterday. That seemed like forever now. Where had all the people gone?

"What if we're the only ones left in the world?" asked Betsy, thinking out loud. "We haven't seen anybody, right? It could be..."

"Oh Betsy, that sounds like one of your story ideas," said Tacy, joking, but also fearful that it could be true as well. But she wouldn't give into that thought. "Two girls alone in the world, a world ravaged by dinosaurs," she continued in a dramatic voice.

"Maybe a handsome prince could come along and save them, pull them up on his strong white steed? But no, I rather like the idea of these two strong girls saving themselves, of having their adventure and conquering whatever comes their way."

"I like that better too," said Tacy. "You and me, two strong girls."

"Yessirree Bob!" said Betsy.

"Oh, that reminds me of your father. He always says that, doesn't he?" said Tacy.

"Oh yeah," said Betsy, softly. "Well, we can't stay away from reminders about our families, especially not sitting here by Murmuring Lake. This is actually where my whole family started, with Papa borrowing a cup of salt from Mama when he and his friends

were camping down by the lake. That's how they met. And that makes me happy and sad to think about right now, happy to think of a young Mama and Papa falling love, right here by the lake, and sad that I can't be with them right now and don't know what happened to them. But I can't dwell on it. Right now, it's all about going forward."

"And at least we have each other," said Tacy. "That is a very good thing."

"Yessirree Bob!" said Betsy loudly, and they both laughed.

After eating, they walked down to the water's edge for a few minutes to look around, to enjoy the beautiful autumn colors, the blue of the lightly shimmering water. The orange and brown and gold leaves that remained on the trees circled the lake and reflected in the water, forming a double ring. "I can almost smell the chicken dinners cooking at the Inn," said Betsy.

And then it was time to go. They check their maps again, looked at the compass to make sure they were on track, and kept heading west to Milwaukee. They didn't know if they'd find a town to sleep in that night or if they'd just hunker down with their blankets in a grassy bed, but somehow they'd find a way to make it work. They were girl adventurers now. "I'm going to have a lot of interesting things to write about after this trip," said Betsy. "More than I can imagine, I'm sure."

"That's for sure," said Tacy. "This will be rich material for a writer."

They were going to see what traveling they could get in before it got completely dark. Due to their more frequent breaks, they still had energy to walk, and their feet weren't too sore. Still, they could tell what a long distance they were going to have to go. Looking at the map, they'd only done a smidgen of the trip so far. There were a lot more smidgens to go.

They were walking down the dirt road, through the rather drab countryside of dried grasses and dried harvested farm fields. The sun was setting and looked pretty, with pinks and golds and lavender. That was when they heard the first sign of life in almost two days. It was a horse and cart, with a man at the reins, rumbling softly behind them. Betsy and Tacy looked at each other. In Deep Valley, strangers weren't any big deal. It was a small town and even if they didn't know everyone, it had a safe feel to the community and almost everyone was friendly. Everyone probably knew her father anyway, since he was the only shoe store in town (though Lion's Department Store did sell shoes as well).

But strangers out in the world were a different story... was everyone safe? How would they know?

"We could wave at him, Betsy, and see where he's going. Maybe he'd be willing to give us a ride," suggested Tacy. It was surprising that Tacy would suggest this, since she tended to be shy around a lot of people. But it had been sobering to look at the map and think that it could take them 36 days of walking to get to Milwaukee. That was a lot! So the idea of asking to a ride didn't seem so daunting. Hopefully he would be a nice man, and hopefully he'd say yes.

They talked about it quietly between them as the horse and cart got closer. They devised a secret signal they could give each other if they thought the man didn't look right, if he made them nervous, or if they wanted to say no. They could tap their chin to let the other friend know, and then they wouldn't ask for or take a ride.

The rumbling noise of the cart grew louder behind them, and they could hear the clop-clop-clop of horse hooves, too. It was a very welcome sound after going without

seeing any people or horses for such a while. Betsy and Tacy decided to turn around and wait, to make sure they had a chance to connect with the driver.

In the shadows of twilight, they could see that the horse was a sturdy brown work horse with some black patches on it. The cart was a farm cart, and wooden furniture was in the back-- a table and chairs, an old cradle, a dismantled bed frame. The man sitting in the driver's seat was wearing dungaree overalls, a red and white checked shirt, had a blanket around his shoulders, a big straw hat pulled down, one hand holding loosely onto the reins, the other on a pipe. They stood to the side and watched the horse and cart and driver come within range. The driver got close enough and Betsy and Tacy waved as blue eyes looked up and straight at them. "Whoa," said the driver, pulling on the reins.

The driver's hand went up to take off the hat, and it was then that they saw the yellowy-white braids hanging down, and the wrinkled and worn feminine face. "Slow down, boy," she commanded the horse in her gritty voice.

"Well, what have we here?" the old woman asked, looking down at the two girls. "Isn't it a bit late for two young'uns like you to be out on the road?" She'd taken the pipe out of her mouth to talk.

"It is," admitted Betsy, holding tight to Tacy's hand. "But we're on a long journey, so we have to be on the road day and night."

The woman hmph-ed. "Well, let's start things off right. I'm Missy Walter from Rochester. I'm a furniture maker, furniture fixer, and furniture seller. Anything wooden, actually. Learned the business and the skills from my father long ago, and I was better at it than my brothers, so that's what I do. Who are you and where are you from?"

"I'm Betsy Ray, and this is Tacy Kelly. We're from Deep Valley, but we're on the way to Milwaukee."

"Milwaukee!" the woman let out a cackle. "And you're walking there? Two little ones like you? That will take forever and a day."

"It might take us a long time, but we're going to get there," said Tacy firmly.

Missy Walter looked them up and down. "I do believe you will," she said at last.

"Are you going to Rochester now?" asked Betsy. "We're wondering if we could get a ride, if you're going in that direction?"

"That's right smart of you," said Missy Walter, puffing on her pipe. "Take a ride if you can get one. Yes, I'm going to Rochester tonight. I will be there within an hour, I reckon, so I should light the lantern now, since it'll be dark before you know it. And I'd be happy to give you girls a ride."

"Oh, thank you so much, Mrs. Walter!" said Tacy, so happy at the idea of getting to ride the next 10 miles instead of having to walk them, one step at a time.

"It's Miss Walter, but no one ever calls me that. I never married," she said. "No man to take care of me." She smiled. "Why don't you girls get in, see if you can find a spot in the back."

They settled into the back of the wagon, using their backpacks as pillows to rest on. Missy lit the lanterns that would help her see the road, and the horse (Patches, Missy told them) waited patiently. And then they were off, the slow rumble, bumpy ride of the wagon, sitting amidst the wooden furniture that Missy was either going to repair or sell, maybe both. They rode in silence. It was hard to talk over the noise of the wagon wheels on the dry dirt road and the clop of the horse hooves. They watched the sunset dissolve into darkness, watched stars slowly come out, saw the moon rising, a pretty crescent. It

was a time to think and rest and daydream. They would get to Rochester a lot faster this way. And maybe Missy would be willing to put them up for the night, even in a barn would be fine. Whew, this was a relief. Just having her be a woman, even if she was different from any other woman they'd ever encountered before, that was okay. It felt safer, just to be around a woman, rather than a strange man.

The cart rumbled and rattled along the road, and Betsy and Tacy bounced and jumbled in the back, and eventually they both fell asleep. A fitful sleep that they kept waking from, disjointed, sometimes not remembering where they were. The night was very black, just lit up by a few stars, the moon and the two lantern lights that Missy had hanging in front to light the way. At last they saw a dark shadow of a city appear out front, and then once they reached the city, they took a curving road through the city, turned some corners and passed to a far corner, where there was a long driveway off the road, and Missy turned the horse and cart down that way. The house and barn where they finally stopped was just beyond the city, Rochester, they presumed, and tucked away in a woodsy nook. "You girls awake? This is home for me."

There was a light on in the window, and Missy drove the horse up to the barn and stopped him with an almost unnecessary "whoa." The horse knew what to do. Patches knew he was home.

Missy was unhooking the horse from the wagon as Betsy and Tacy jumped out of the cart into the darkness. Did they dare ask this toughened old woman for a place to sleep? Or should they just take their bags and walk and find some place they could curl up for the night?

The front door opened, and they saw a figure come outside. The light from the open door lit up the inky darkness, and they could see it was a woman in a white dress

and apron, pretty with curly dark hair, maybe not as old as Missy but still a wizened face. "I was beginning to wonder if you'd make it tonight," the woman called cheerfully. "I'm glad you're home." Then they saw the woman in white go up to Missy and interrupt her horse and cart duties with a kiss and a hug. The woman in white turned then, having caught a glimpse of something out of the corner of her eye. "But what do we have here?" she asked with great curiosity, seeing Betsy and Tacy standing there.

"Selma, this is Betsy and Tacy, two girls from Deep Valley who tell me they're walking to Milwaukee, can you imagine? I'm not sure why... we didn't get much of a chance to talk with the noisy horse and cart. But I was hoping they'd give us a chance to talk if they needed a place to stay the night." Missy nodded at them.

Betsy and Tacy looked at each other, and neither one of them tapped their chin. Of course, all they had was their instincts to go on, but this was looking okay to them. These women seemed nice, and just the fact that they were women made them less threatening already. So Betsy spoke up, "Um, Missy and Miss, uh --"

"Templeton," said Selma. "But you can call me Selma."

"Selma," said Betsy. "That would be wonderful. We do need a place to stay for just the night, and then we'll be on our way again. Thank you."

"Well, this is all a surprise for me, but I do like to have company, and we so rarely get it," said Selma, smiling. "Come in, girls. We have a room you can stay in, but first, let me get some warm food in you. If you've been walking from Deep Valley, I'm sure you'll need a good meal."

They'd had their spare dinner of bread and a bit of meat and cheese hours ago, so the idea of a warm meal was very nice. Missy showed them to the washroom while Selma served up bowls of a thick chicken stew with lots of vegetables. The girls were

glad to get to wash up and use a proper toilet (that had been one of the not-so-fun parts of their walking adventure, the realization that there were no bathrooms to use along the road, and they'd have to go out in the weeds to relieve themselves). They felt a little less grungy and earthy after the quick clean up. Just outside the washroom door, Betsy and Tacy whispered together. "Do you think they are sisters?" asked Tacy.

"They don't look like it," said Betsy.

"Something about it..." said Tacy slowly, pondering, "it almost feels like they're married."

"You know two women can't get married," said Betsy.

"Maybe they're just friends," said Tacy.

"Maybe we'll find out," said Betsy.

Then they joined Missy and Selma at the table. The house was a big farmhouse, a cozy kitchen with a lot of colorful fabric for chair cushions and curtains, and lots of big and small paintings on the wall. As Betsy and Tacy looked around with interest, Selma explained, "I'm an artist. I love to decorate, I paint, and I make things with fabric. I also knit. In fact, I have a stash of hats that I made, and I bet I can find two hats that would fit you girls, since it sounds like you're on a long journey and it's cold outside. I do also like to cook."

"I like your house," said Tacy. "I like all the colors everywhere."

"Thank you," said Selma. "Missy does the gardening. We have a very large garden, and I do help out a little. She has her furniture business, and does some handy work, too. She's so good with tools and mechanics. We have a good complement of skills."

The big bowls of chicken stew were wonderful, and it felt good to sit at a proper table and use napkins and silverware. It hadn't been that long since they'd had a good

meal in actual time, but it seemed like forever, after all these long periods of waiting in the alley, walking through a ghost town Deep Valley, and walking so far from their homes today. A hot meal was much appreciated, especially when they didn't know when there would be another one on the horizon.

"So girls," said Selma. "I'm too curious. What has made you start walking from Deep Valley to Milwaukee. That seems like a very difficult task you've set for yourselves. What is the story behind it?"

Tacy let Betsy tell the story, since she was the better storyteller, and Tacy just filled in bits here and there. Betsy told of the showman coming to town and how that whole situation ended, how they'd hid in the alley, how they'd found the town abandoned after that horrible night. How they'd come home to their family homes and their decision to go to Milwaukee. It was a great story, actually, and there was a lot of good drama in it. Both Selma and Missy put down their spoons and listened, fascinated.

"We hadn't heard anything about a dinosaur issue in Deep Valley," said Missy, "and word about things like that usually travels pretty fast. I was not too far from there the other day, before I came back to Rochester, and I hadn't heard a thing."

"I wonder what happened?" asked Selma, clutching her steaming mug of tea. "That's just so strange... a whole town gone like that."

Betsy and Tacy nodded, looking very serious. To have other adults acknowledge the seriousness made it even more so to them.

"But it isn't safe or right for you girls to go all the way to Milwaukee by yourselves!" said Selma, after she encouraged everyone to go back to their soup. "You're only 12, and that's a very long journey. You should just stay here with us and we can try

to alert some authorities who can figure out what's going on, or what happened. You shouldn't be all alone in the Big World."

Betsy frowned a little. The Big World. That's what Julia always like to call it. And where was Julia now?

But they weren't going to be deterred, as nice as it was to have some adults caring about them and wanting to take care of them. That would be easy. But they didn't want to stay here and just wait and see. They wanted to complete the mission they'd taken on, and they knew they were strong enough to do it, too.

"Yes, you can stay as long as you need to," agreed Missy. "We have plenty of space.

Betsy and Tacy looked at each other, and Tacy was tapping her chin. Betsy spoke for them. "With all due respect, ma'ams, it's so kind of you to offer that to us, but we need to keep going on our journey in the morning. We'll certainly take a bed for tonight. I know you won't agree with it, but it's what we feel we need to do. And we know we can take care of ourselves." Tacy nodded along.

"Twelve is so young! I don't think you girls know what you're getting yourself into. The Great World isn't Deep Valley. Everyone isn't nice out there. You need some grownups to take care of things for you. We want to help you. I'm insisting that you stay!" said Selma, slamming her open hand down on the brown oak table. Her face looked very upset and concerned, with frowning eyebrows, stern lips, a red flush to her cheeks.

Missy put down her spoon and reached across the table to cover Selma's hand. "Now now, Sweetie. I know you don't like hearing about their situation, but remember what it was like when we were their age?" She turned to Betsy and Tacy and told them, "both Selma and I had hard childhoods, and we had to learn to take care of ourselves

and be responsible since we were about your age. At first it was hard, but then we wanted to. It made us strong, and we learned just how much we could really do." She turned her gaze back to Selma, whose face had calmed down measurably, softening and looking a little sad. "I know it's hard to think about letting them go, Selma, but if that's what they want, then we should let them. We won't be able to stop them anyway, just like we wouldn't have let anyone stop us when we were their age."

Betsy felt a burst of gladness, listening to Missy talk. Here she was, one of the oddest women she had met, in her dungarees and straw hat and smoking a pipe, looking almost like a man, working like one too, not bound by the traditional roles of women she'd always seen growing up. Grownup women wore dresses or long skirts and shirtwaists. They took care of the house, cooked all the meals, shopped and did laundry, raised the children and did a lot of visiting. They attended school performances and went to church. And here was a woman living outside that world, well, two women, really. Selma was a little more traditional, but not much. She was more of an artist, and she seemed to be in love with another woman-- that was very much outside the regular world. But Betsy could see that although it was different from what she'd known, it was nice. These two women had built a life of their own, and they both seemed to be good people who cared about others and took care of themselves. Betsy and Tacy were not that far from their home yet, but already the world had become a much bigger place.

"Thank you," Tacy said to Missy, and Betsy knew they both felt the same.

Selma sighed and gave a rueful smile to all of them. "I know you're right, Dear Heart. I just see them and think about ourselves at their age too, and I just want to scoop them up and protect them. We didn't have anyone doing that for us. But I know it's right to let go, if that's what you girls really want."

"We do," said both Betsy and Tacy together.

It was already getting late. After they finished their soup, Selma set up the guest room for the girls, where there was a big soft and comfortable bed for them to sleep on. Missy and Selma talked about making sure the girls had more provisions to take with them: a fresh supply of water, some dried beef that they could use when their fresh meat had been used up, extra sandwiches and some dried fruit. Missy looked at their maps and gave them a clearer idea of how to use them, and how to get where they wanted to go. Betsy and Tacy were extremely grateful.

Before they went to sleep, Betsy went out to the kitchen where Selma was alone, packing bags for them for the morning. Tacy was in the washroom, and Missy was somewhere else, maybe out in the barn. Betsy just wanted to ask, because she was so curious, but she was afraid it was a rude question. "Um, Selma, can I ask you something?" Betsy spoke softly.

"Sure Betsy, what is it?" Selma wrapped the sandwiches in white cotton cloth.

"Well, I was wondering, if you don't mind my asking... are you and Missy married?" Betsy swallowed hard. It might be an upsetting question for Selma. Betsy wasn't sure. But she was too curious not to ask.

Selma gave Betsy a quick glance, then quickly wiped her hands and walked over to the table, sitting down and pulling out a chair for Betsy to sit in. Selma gave a deep sigh, then smiled softly at the young girl.

"No, Missy and I aren't married, Betsy. Two women can't marry each other in this country, it just isn't allowed. But Missy and I met each other when we were teenagers, and we fell in love, just like boys and girls fall in love. At first we were just friends, but

both of us knew that the love we were feeling was more-than-friends. We wanted to be together like a couple."

"So you didn't like boys?" Betsy asked. She was just trying to understand.

"We liked boys as friends, but we weren't interested in going on dates with boys or holding hands or dancing. We were more interested in other girls, and with each other. It was pretty confusing for each of us, though because it was something that was so different from what everyone else was doing. And we knew that other people wouldn't understand, and they might even be against it. We learned that women who love other women are called lesbians. And that lesbians often have to hide how they feel, or hide their relationships, because we live in a time when only women and men can get married, not two women, or two men. It's against the law."

"Oh," said Betsy. She hadn't even thought about two men loving each other. But that made sense, that not everyone had to be the same in the world. That there were all different kinds of people. It was still strange to think about. "Lesbians. What are two men who love each other called?"

"Gay. What do you think about this, Betsy? It's not something a lot of people know about these days, or talk about." Selma's brow furrowed in concern.

"Well, it does sound strange to me, just because I've never heard about or seen anything like this before. But the more I think about it, the more okay it sounds. I mean, why can't two boys or two girls be together if they love each other? Everyone isn't the same in the world. And all the differences make it more interesting." She smiled at Selma. "Do you mind if I tell Tacy about this? She and I talk about almost everything."

"No, you can talk to anyone you like about this. Some people won't understand, though, and some people even get angry and hateful about it, which is very sad. We

aren't hurting anyone by loving each other. But some people act like we are doing something very bad."

"That must be hard, when people are like that," said Betsy, imagining what it would feel like to have people be so mean.

"It is. That's why we live off to ourselves a little. We have to be careful around people. It's not easy. We hide if we need to. Maybe someday it won't be like this," said Selma.

Betsy nodded. And then she thanked Selma and went off to bed. She would talk to Tacy about this on their long walk tomorrow. They would have plenty of time for talking and chewing on ideas, back and forth. They both slept comfortably in the bed, but when the morning came, they were ready to go, eager to be on the road and onward on their journey.

They got up with the sun, and Selma and Missy were up too, getting to their day's work. They had a quick breakfast of sausage and eggs, which Selma said should keep them for a while throughout the day. "Fuel them up," said Missy, who thought more in terms of engines. Betsy and Tacy gave them both hugs and thanked them profusely for all the help and supplies and comfort they had given them, and for letting them go. That part was important. Betsy could tell that Selma was torn, maybe even a little heartbroken to see these two girls go off on their own for such a long journey, weighed down with packs. She kissed each of their foreheads after they gave her their hugs. She gave each of them a card with their address on it. "Write to us and let us know how you're doing, when you make it to Milwaukee. We'd like to hear from you," she said. Betsy and Tacy nodded solemnly, and then turned with a wave and walked away. They had good instructions from Missy on exactly how to get through the town of Rochester-

what streets to walk down, what landmarks to watch out for. They knew more than they did before Missy had happened on them last night with her horse and cart. For that, they were grateful. And they could see how they might get the opportunity to learn more from others they hadn't met yet along this journey.

After they walked beyond Missy and Selma's long driveway, Betsy and Tacy were alone again, and turned to each other and smiled. "Who would've guessed when we started walking yesterday morning that we'd end up with a night spent like that?" said Betsy.

"They were very nice. And it got us further along our trip," said Tacy.

"It was a good thing," said Betsy.

They enjoyed walking through the streets of Rochester, which was just beginning to wake up and be busy. Rochester was much bigger than Deep Valley. It had more of everything: more streets, more people, more horses, more buildings, even some taller buildings than they'd seen before. And more dinosaurs. It seemed like people were using dinosaurs more for working purposes than they'd seen in Deep Valley. They saw an ankylosaurus and a stegosaurus being used to haul heavy carts of lumber and building materials. They were slow but steady, probably not much different than an ox. They saw an apatosaurus being used for a new building going up. There was a man strapped onto the dinosaur's head, and had obviously trained the dinosaur to hold him close enough to the building that he could work on it. "Wow," said Betsy and Tacy, stopping to look up for a moment. It was sure interesting to get to see another town, to see what it was like, and how similar and yet how different it was from their own town, miles away.

They passed through Rochester, and then were back out onto dry and desolate country roads. It was nice to have the nature and the quiet and the big blue sky all around them.

Chapter 6: On, Wisconsin!

For the next three days, Betsy and Tacy walked, or sometimes trudged, sometimes skipped their way along until they were nearing La Crosse, Wisconsin. They kept track of their journey on the map, checking the compass frequently, so they knew when they crossed from Minnesota into Wisconsin. Wisconsin! They were now in a different state, and they'd gotten there by walking! It was an amazing thing to them. Girl power! And this was something that, if you'd told them a month ago that they'd be doing this, they would have never believed it.

They were true loners for those three days, even though they did see some people along the way. They ate from their stash of food, drank from their water flasks (which they did refill from a pump on a farm after asking the farmer's wife if it would be okay). They rested by the roadside, sang songs as they went ("There's a place called Milwaukee, Milwaukee," was a favorite), or told each other stories. Betsy was good at weaving long stories, and now it turned out they could have a serial story, continuing on with the same characters every day. They were sore and tired from all the walking, but they could tell they were getting stronger, too, that they were able to walk longer, that they were getting more muscles in their calves and thighs.

It seemed like a milestone as they approached La Crosse, the next town. It was a little bigger town, a destination on their map, and a place where they could rest and refuel. Three days of walking and eating had diminished their supplies, and now they might have to go into a store or shop, or find someone they could buy some food from.

And hopefully they could find somewhere to wash up! They were getting dirty from all the walking and sleeping outside. Strangely enough, they were getting used to

feeling filthy, too, whereas at first it had seemed icky and itchy. They did take their comb out and tidy up their hair every morning, and used a little tiny bit of their water to rub their faces clean, so they wouldn't look like total ragamuffins. There wasn't much they could do about the rest of themselves, though, or their clothing.

They walked into La Crosse, a pretty town with a stone church with a very high steeple. They could see it for a few miles before they got to the town, stretched out to the sky. It made them feel good to see it, a little beacon they could aim for. They wanted to see this church, go inside and see what it was like. They knew what some of the churches were like in Deep Valley, but they were all pretty small. This one looked almost like a little castle.

They had given up their usual 4:00 rest to just push forward to get to town. They were eager to keep going and get there. Their legs were sore, but they pushed forward. They would sit down once they got into town.

What they noticed was that sometimes they got strange looks from people, especially if they passed through very small towns, where surely everybody knew each other and they would see these strange girls walking together with big packs on their backs.

There was a small farm on the outer edge of the city, and they saw a large and very tidy looking garden at the back. Most of the garden was dried or hoed under because it was getting later in autumn, and the growing season was mostly done, but there were a few crops that hardy gardeners could keep going until snowfall, like kale or Brussels sprouts or carrots. A woman was bending over in the garden with a basket by her feet, and big green leaves were poking up out of it. The woman wore a blue dress with a long skirt, and had a flowery apron on the front of her clothes. Betsy and Tacy had learned to

spot approachable people, and a woman in a garden was pretty approachable. The woman looked up as they entered her back yard.

Betsy spoke up: "Ma'am, would you be so kind as to let us use your water pump? We would just like to refill our water bottles and maybe wash our faces and hands?"

The woman stood up. She was young with a smooth face, blue-gray eyes, a scarf around her head, reddish brown hair and plump pink lips. She frowned for a moment, looking them over, not displeased but more scrutinizing them. She seemed to know about being careful. Betsy noticed she had freckles, kind of like Tacy's. The woman pursed her lips and seemed to make a decision; her eyes softened and she took on a motherly, nurturing look.

"Where are you girls from?" she asked.

"Deep Valley," said Tacy.

"That's a long way for two girls your age to come. Did you walk the whole way?" A little boy came out of house now, maybe three years old. He looked like he'd just woken up, rubbing his eyes and dragging a blanket with him. He looked at the two girls with curiosity, and went straight for his mama's leg and wrapped one of his arms around it, while he hugged his light blue blanket to him. His reddish-brown hair, just like his mother's, was all tousled from sleep. He had a cute upturned nose. He stood hiding his face into his mother's skirt, and then would quickly peek out at the two strange girls in his yard. Tacy bent down a little and smiled at him; she was always so good with little kids and babies, and she knew how to interact. She gave him a little wave with a big smile and wide eyes, and he smiled at her shyly.

Betsy said, "We walked a lot of it, but we did get a ride from someone for about two hours. That helped."

Tacy spoke up. "My name is Tacy, and this is Betsy."

The woman said, "Nice to meet you. I'm Marigold, and this little guy is Ben." She put a hand on the top of his head and he smiled.

"Hi Ben, nice to meet you," said Tacy, softening her voice and leaning down to smile at him again.

"I'm 'f-ree'" he said, holding up three fingers.

"What a big boy!" said Tacy enthusiastically.

"Why are you dirty?" he asked, his eyes puzzled. "Mama, why they so dirty?"

Marigold looked at the girls and shrugged, and they all laughed.

Betsy spoke to him then. "We sure need a bath, don't we, Ben?" She looked up at Marigold. "But we aren't asking for that. Just some water would be wonderful."

"Of course you can have water. No problem with that. And I just made cookies this afternoon, so you're welcome to those too."

"Thank you, that's so kind," said Tacy.

Marigold took them over the pump, and went into the house for a minute. Ben stayed with Betsy and Tacy, fascinated with them and even now saying their names over and over, "Tacy Betsy Tacy Betsy."

Marigold came back with a bar of soap and two wash rags. "It isn't much, but it will help a little," she said. Betsy and Tacy thanked her profusely. A little soap would go a long way right now. They used it to wash their faces and necks and arms. They already felt better, refreshed by the cold pump water. They refilled their flasks and took some long drinks. And then Marigold brought out a plate of cookies, a jug of milk and four cups, and the four of them sat at the outdoor picnic table eating fresh spicy ginger cookies and drinking the sweet creamy milk.

"This is great," said Tacy. "We haven't had milk in a while, and the cookies are delicious."

"De-wish-ous," repeated Ben, taking a big bite of his cookie.

"What are you going to do in La Crosse?" asked Marigold. "Are you just passing through?"

"We're mostly just passing through. But we've been drawn to the church steeple ever since we could see it a few miles away," said Betsy. "We'd really like to see the church up close, maybe go inside. And we'd like to visit a shop to replenish some of our supplies. We just take what we can carry for a few days, and then we stock up again when we can. So far it's been working."

"Well, I can give you a few cookies and a loaf of bread to take with you. I'd be happy to do that. Yesterday was my bread baking day, so I have plenty. As for the church, that's Prairie Star Universalist Church. It's a beautiful church. That's where we attend services." She looked down at Ben. "We go to the big church, don't we, Ben?"

"Church. I like church," said Ben, nodding.

"What's Universalist?" asked Tacy. "I don't think we have a church like that in Deep Valley."

Marigold explained, "Universalist is a religion that believes that all people are saved, that there is no hell, that a loving God wouldn't condemn anyone he created to hell. It's a lot about freedom of religion, about people being free to believe what they want. We celebrate the inherent worth and dignity of all people, that everyone is worthy of love."

"I like that. I've never heard of a church like that before, but it sounds good. Like a very nice way to treat people, with love." Betsy turned to Tacy and said, "We sure are

learning a lot about a lot of different things on this trip, aren't we Tacy? I wonder if we'll run into more Universalist churches on our trip."

Marigold smiled. "There aren't a lot of them, out here in the Midwest, anyway. There are many out on the East coast, and many in Europe. I think more people might like the Universalist beliefs if they knew about them."

Tacy nodded. "I never liked all that stuff about Hell that I learned growing up. It sure made God seem mean."

Marigold gave them directions on how to get to the Prairie Star Universalist Church on foot, and a good general store to go to, to buy more provisions. She bundled up cookies and a loaf of bread for them, and then she and Ben waved goodbye to them. Like the women in Rochester, Missy and Selma, Marigold gave them a card with her address on it so that they could write to her to let her know when they'd arrived in Milwaukee. It was nice to think of the people they met caring about them, wanting to know how they got along in the future.

And now they could see the town of La Crosse as they walked through, a smaller town than Rochester had been. The streets were narrower, the houses had more of a country cottage feel to them. It felt similar to Deep Valley, and they walked toward the downtown area, where the Universalist Church was standing. Marigold had thought it might be open so they could go inside and look around. The downtown area had a handful of two story buildings, but most were one stories, some cute shops, a toy store with a big display window that they stopped and window shopped at for a few minutes.

"Remember when we used to play with toys like these?" said Tacy, eyeing train sets and blocks and little doll houses. Tacy's brother had a train set that Betsy and Tacy

had sometimes played with. There were no trains in Betsy's house because there were no boys, and trains were only given to boys.

"Look at the dolls!" said Betsy, sighing with admiration. "We had so much fun with dolls. They're so pretty. But remember the paper dolls, Tacy? We played with paper dolls more than regular dolls, and we had so many adventures with them, didn't we?"

"Adventures all around the kitchen and parlor!" remembered Tacy. "They were such fun, not just to play with, but to look through all the magazines for the dolls and anything for their houses. That was half the fun."

They had a little moment back-in-time, staring in that window, gazing on all the shiny new playthings. There hadn't been a whole lot of toys in either of their houses, but they'd had a lot of fun with what they did have, and all the hand-me-down toys of older brothers and sisters (especially in Tacy's house, where there'd been so many kids). But they'd had a lot of fun with non-toy toys, like household items, and with just their imaginations too.

They turned away from the window, feeling bittersweet. "Well, we may not have any toys on this journey, and we really don't even want toys now that we're 12, but one thing we do have with us, wherever we go, is our imaginations. And that's really the best entertainment of all, isn't it?" said Betsy.

"Especially your imagination, Betsy," said Tacy, who was always the greatest admirer of her friend.

"Oh pshaw," said Betsy with a wave of her hand. "I may write down the stuff in my imagination more, but you have just as much of an imagination as me, Tacy."

They agreed to call a truce on that idea, since neither one of them would relent. And then they turned and continued their progression toward the church.

As they got closer, they noticed that the church had many windows but unlike other churches, they were not stained glass. They were all golden, letting light inside. The church was made of gray stone and very tall, and as they got closer, they could see it was not very ornate, had a more simple but impressive style. There were some doves of peace sculptures onto it, and sculptures of flame as well. "I hope we can go inside," said Tacy.

"Well, there's one way to find out," said Betsy as they approached. There were very tall heavy wooden double doors in the shape of arches at the front, and she reached out and pulled on one of the metal door handles. The door swung open a little, and Betsy pulled on it harder, realizing now how very heavy the doors were.

The inside of the church was very pretty, in a simple-line kind of way. There was an altar like other churches, but no crosses or stone figures of Jesus or his disciples. "There are no saints," Tacy whispered, "not like in the Catholic churches."

"And no kneelers, like in the Episcopal or Catholic churches, either," noticed Betsy.

It was darkish and quiet, but light did flow in so nicely through the golden windows, whereas stained glass would have made the church much darker. The ceilings were more than two stories high, with pillars down the sides supporting the beautiful arches of the architecture. There were rich oil paintings from artists on the wall, paintings of nature that were exquisite and magnificent. There was a long red carpet down the center aisle, which added a regal feel to the place. There were bouquets of beautiful flowers up where the altar was, and a lovely stone chalice.

"It's very nice," said Betsy. "Peaceful."

"I've never seen a church with ceilings so tall before," said Tacy. "It would feel so special to come sit here every Sunday."

They were whispering because it was so very quiet inside the church, almost like the church was resting and they didn't want to disturb it. They walked up closer to the altar, and then they had the living daylights scared out of them when they heard a tremendous "AAARRRGH!" shout echoing in the high arches of the still and silent church. The two girls jumped and gasped and then immediately went into crouch position, a protective stance. They each had somewhat crouched in a row of the wooden pews, too, so they could peek out and see what was even going on. Their hearts were beating like fast pony hooves in their chests. And then they saw a boy standing there, right in front of the altar, brandishing a broom as if he was about to run with it like a lancing sword. He was in a fierce warrior stance too.

"Who goes there?" shouted the boy.

Betsy and Tacy had each hidden in the pews, one on either side of the aisle. They could see each other, though the boy could not see them. They looked at each other questioningly, gulping but keeping silent. They weren't sure about this boy or what he was going to do. Was he dangerous? Would he hurt them? Betsy thought he just had a broom, but still, he could hit them with it. He was unpredictable and unknown, so they decided to lay low to see what their next move would be.

He stood there and repeated, in a booming, stern voice, "I said, Who goes there?"

Betsy and Tacy kept quiet.

Finally, they heard a heavy sigh and the boy dropped his stance and put down the broom. "Aw gee, you're no fun, whoever you are. I saw someone in here. Show yourself,

please?" He had a high voice for a boy. His voice hadn't deepened yet, like some boys they knew.

Okay, Betsy nodded to Tacy. It seemed safer now, though he was still such an unknown quantity. At least he was young and not aiming a broom at them. They both stood up and looked at him.

"Oh, there are two of you. Girls, I should've figured." He sounded disappointed.

The boy standing before them looked to be about their age, similar in size to Herbert and Tom and other 12-year-old boys they knew. He had short brown hair that was straight and stuck out a little, like it was easy to get windblown or mussed. He wore a simple white button-down shirt and brown pants with a belt around the middle, and black boots like a pirate that came up to his knees. Maybe he was trying to be a pirate, Betsy wondered. If he'd had a red kerchief tied around his head, or a big black hat with a feather plume, it might have worked as a costume. He had a smallish, sweet face and very dark eyes that were taking them in, scrutinizing them, as they were him. He held the big broom in his hands, now like one actually holds a broom and not a sword.

"Who are you, and where do you hail from?" he asked. He obviously liked to play with his language, as if he were in old England.

"I'm Betsy, and this is my friend Tacy," said Betsy, pointing her hand toward Tacy. "We're from Deep Valley."

"Is that in Minnesota?" he asked.

Tacy nodded.

"Pretty far away?" he asked.

"Well, it took us about five days to get here," said Betsy in explanation. She heaved her pack off her shoulders and onto the pew next to her. It felt good to have it off.

The boy looked at them incredulously. "You WALKED here for five days? You two?"

Tacy got a little huffy at that. How dare he think that the two of them, just because they were young and just because they were girls, couldn't walk for five days. Her nose was a little in the air as she answered, "Pretty much. We had one little ride, but mostly we walked, all by ourselves. But that's nothing. We're actually walking to Milwaukee, and that could take us 20 more days. We can do it."

The boy's eyes bugged out even more. He was muttering under his breath, was it curses or statements of disbelief, they didn't know. He did seem impressed, even if it was evident he didn't entirely believe them.

"Now see here," said Betsy, interrupting his little reverie. "We told you who we are, but you haven't told us who you are. No fair. Please tell us." She gave him a half smile of encouragement. She wasn't sure that she wanted to encourage him too much yet.

He stopped and shook his head, as if she'd just woken up. "Oh right, sorry," he said, and then he stepped forward and leaned forward from the waist in a flourish of a bow. "I am Anker Turtlemap at your service, your humble servant from La Crosse, Wisconsin."

"Nice to meet you," said Tacy with a nod of her head. "I've never heard the name Anker before."

He looked perplexed at that. "I've never heard the name Tacy before," he said. He turned to look at Betsy. "I've heard Betsy before, though. Not at all original," he added, giving a wink to both of them.

Oh, so he was a teaser. They knew how to tease a boy. But he'd better watch out, for they'd had a lot of practice, especially with Herbert, who was a really big teaser.

"What are you doing in this church? With a broom?" Betsy asked.

"I steal brooms from churches," said Anker with a serious look on his face. When Betsy and Tacy looked a bit surprised at that answer, he smirked. "What do you think? I'm sweeping. I've got a job. I clean up the church, and do whatever else Minister Ford asks me to do. A man's got to live..."

"Why do you have a job?" asked Tacy.

"Because," Anker answered, starting to sweat in earnest, biting his lip, as if he hated this part of the story. "I'm an orphan and I need a place to live. My ma died when I was little, and when my pa died when I was 10, Minister Ford said I could live in the church house. He and Mrs. Ford live there with their baby Sammy, and they have an extra room. He made a deal with me that I could live with them and have money to take care of myself if I help keep the church clean every week. So that's my job. That's why I said, 'a man's got to live.'" Because I'm a man," he raised one of his arms in a muscle man pose, "and I got to live."

"That's sad about your parents," said Tacy. "Do you like it here."

He shrugged. "It's all right. The Fords are good to me. And people in the church like to spoil me now and then, knowing I'm all alone. Between Mrs. Doolittle's cinnamon buns and Mr. Henry's venison steaks and Miss Lila's cakes, I eat real good." He patted his belly and smiled.

Both girls smiled at him too, though they could feel a little bit of the sadness he was masking.

"So, is part of your job running around with a broom trying to defend yourself as if it were a sword?" asked Betsy, teasingly. "Because if it isn't, you should probably get paid extra for that."

Anker looked a bit sheepish, and hid his eyes with his palm. "Oh geez. I get a bit carried away sometimes. I have a really active imagination, everyone tells me. But that's how I keep it fun. Otherwise sweeping a whole church gets pretty boring. So it's better if I imagine I'm a knight defending the church from evil doers or dragons, or if I pretend I'm on safari in Africa and I'm hunting down wildebeests or saving people from lions, or something."

"Your secret is safe with us," said Tacy. "We know what it's like. We have very active imaginations too, and everyone knows it. It's pretty great. In fact, Betsy uses her imagination a whole lot, because she's a writer and she's always making up stories."

"Wow. Okay, now I don't feel so bad about it. It makes life more fun, anyway."

They sat and talked in the church a while. Betsy and Tacy explained their trip, and Anker was amazed by their tales of the T. rex in Deep Valley and the tragedy that happened there. They gave Anker one of their ginger cookies from Marigold while they talked (he knew Marigold too), and he munched away on it happily. He couldn't believe their plan to walk to Milwaukee, with how far away it was, all on foot. They explained how it was an adventure, and they were up for it, not knowing what else to do while their families weren't able to be found. They told him about Tib and what she was like, and how her father was in Dino Control Patrol. How at least they would get to see their dear friend, and her parents had been residents of Deep Valley, so they just might know someone or be able to help somehow. This plan was their best shot, they believed.

Anker was thoughtful, listening to them closely. He had his chin in his hand as he sat on the pew in front of Betsy and Tacy, listening to Betsy finish up the story. "You know, I have an idea of how you could get to Milwaukee sooner," he said at last.

"Don't tell us the train. We don't have money for train tickets," said Tacy.

"No, not the train. This wouldn't have to cost you anything at all. It might even be helping me out, if you decide to do it," he said cryptically.

"What is it?" said Betsy enthusiastically. "Tell us already!" She was gripping the top edge of the amber wooden pew in front of her.

"Pterodactyls," he said, which just puzzled them even further.

"Pterodactyls?" asked Betsy. "Isn't that some kind of dinosaur? I don't remember."

"There are so many different dinosaur names out there," said Tacy. "It's hard to keep them straight."

Anker held out his arms as if he were flying. "Pterodactyls are flying dinosaurs. It just so happens that I have a little business on the side with pterodactyls. I traded in some of my dad's possessions to a guy who trains and sells pterodactyls, and so I got three of them, and trained them further. They're like big homing pigeons, and can carry items in their claws, and I've been training them to let me ride them. I've designed and made some harnesses so I can sit on their backs while they fly, and so far my buddy Todo and I have been the only ones to fly them. I want to be able to use them for travel, to have people pay me for one-way trips flown by dinosaurs. And so far, we've never gone as far as Milwaukee. If I work with you, you could each fly on a pterodactyl to Milwaukee, and I would fly on the third one, to lead the way, and then to lead them back home. I bet we could fly there in less than two days, and you wouldn't have to walk all

that way. It would help me out because then I could test them out on longer flights and see if this is going to work. What do you think?"

Anker looked so happy with this idea, thrilled with it, that Betsy and Tacy gave small smiles so as not to discourage him. But their stomachs were doing flip flops at the idea. "Um, flying on pterodactyls? How high up do they fly?" asked Tacy slowly.

"Oh, way high up. They love to soar through the clouds practically. They have huge wingspans. It's wicked fun up there," he enthused.

"What about falling off?" Betsy asked with a gulp. "It sounds kind of dangerous."

"Aw, you guys aren't scared, are you? I made the harnesses really sturdy and safe. I'm not reckless or anything. I certainly don't want to fall off a flying pterodactyl. That would not be a fun way to die. Don't you worry. It will be fun-- really, it IS fun, if you can get over your fear. There is nothing like soaring through the sky. It will make you wish you were born a bird."

Betsy and Tacy nodded, and then they looked at each other and laughed. They both remembered the time when they were 8 or so and decided to learn to fly by jumping off stoops and jumping out of trees, because Betsy had made up a story about the three birds, the Betsin, the Tacin and the Tibbin. It relieved some of their tension to tell Anker that story, and he liked it. He teased Betsy about getting out of jumping out of the tree. And even after all these years, Betsy blushed thinking about it, how she'd tried to casually fool her friends and how nobody had really been fooled.

"And what about the feather?" Tacy asked. "We were little then, 5 or 6 years old..."

"Oh yes," remembered Betsy, chuckling. "We'd sit on this little bench by our houses after supper and imagine that we were sitting on a big pink feather and it floated

up into the sky, all the way to the clouds, and we could see our whole neighborhood from high up. So we've had some 'experience' with flying, haven't we, Tacy?"

"Yeah, but it's less scary to just fly in our imaginations," said Tacy. "But I guess we shouldn't pass up an opportunity to do it for real-- if it looks safe."

Anker got to his feet then. "Come on, then. I'll introduce you to Ditzzy, Mitzy and Fritzy, my sweet pterodactyls."

Betsy and Tacy gulped, and grabbed hands as they followed Anker out of the side entrance of the church. It was going to be an interesting day.

Chapter 7: Pterodactyls in Flight

Anker put away the broom in a closet in a room behind the sanctuary, and then helped Betsy and Tacy find a remote corner where they could stow their stuff, so they wouldn't have to walk around town with everything. "It's safe in here," he told them. "This is a good church, and a safe town." Then he motioned them to follow him out a side door of the church. The girls held hands, squeezing tight. This was quite a new idea they were being presented with by this strange but friendly boy. They weren't sure how they felt about it all yet. But for now, they were willing to look into it and see what this possibility was all about. If they could really get to Milwaukee quickly and safely, that could be a great turn of events. They really didn't want to leave Deep Valley and the mysteries of what happened to their families and everyone else in limbo for too long. What if people were in trouble and needed help? The sooner they could come back with help would be best, they were both sure.

They followed Anker about a half mile from the church, first down the street and then down some wagon wheel rutted path towards an old stone farm building. He was a friendly host, talking to them about the businesses they passed in town, talking about special events and holiday celebrations that the town would gather for. It sounded to Betsy like Deep Valley, a nice town with a good community who enjoyed gathering together for fun. Of course, the last Deep Valley gathering had been disastrous because of Mr. Lester and Teddy. Hopefully La Crosse wouldn't be having any traumatic gatherings like that.

The stone farm building was on the outskirts of town. It looked a bit beaten up, with some stones along the top edge crumbling away, but there was a heavily planked

roof and the walls were thick. Anker led them up to big weathered wooden doors and lifted the heavy horizontal board that was the latch. The door creaked a little as it released, and then it creaked a lot as Anker swung both of the doors slowly open.

It was darkish inside, with some light coming in from a few missing planks in the roof. Betsy found herself holding her breath. Their interactions with dinosaurs certainly hadn't been very positive lately, and she and Tacy cautiously followed the boy into the mysterious space. They could hear squawks and flapping noises, which grew more excited as Anker walked boldly inside. He turned a corner and went through an inner doorway to the left side of the barn. The floor was tamped-down dirt, a little bumpy, with straw on the ground. They followed him into the side room. Anker spoke cheerfully: "Hi girls, how are you doing today? I brought some nice people to meet you."

As Betsy and Tacy followed him, now they could see the big bird-like dinosaurs resting on thick beds of straw. They were brownish gray with the typical dry, tough looking skin they'd seen on other dinosaurs. They were each about the size of a horse, if a horse had wings. Theirs were big leathery folded-up wings (flapping a bit in the excitement of the moment), and they had spindly but strong legs ending in clawed toes, and large staring eyes in their long narrow beaky heads. As they squawked, the girls could see the row of short pointed teeth.

The girls watched as Anker talked to the dinosaurs, quietly observing how he patted their heads and checked around the stall. Their anxiety subsided as they watched his nonchalance, and soon they stepped closer, and Tacy reached out a hand to touch one head. The dinosaur screeched but allowed her touch. "Which one is this one?" she asked.

"That's Fritzzy. She's the gentlest of the girls," said Anker. "That's Ditzzy," he pointed to the one in front of Betsy, "and this is Mitzy."

"What do they eat?" asked Betsy, reaching out to pet Ditzzy, unable to resist touching such an unusual creature.

"Meat and fish. Meat is more like a treat, since Todo and I can't always get it. When we take them out flying, they'll often hunt their own food. But we fish a lot, since we have the Mississippi River nearby. That's the easiest, but it's still a job keeping them fed. People always say 'eat like a bird' and that means you don't eat much, but these birds really do chow down, especially if we fly them a lot. It looks like Todo already fed them today."

They heard some footsteps behind them. "Yeah, I did," said a deeper voice. They turned to see a tall, lanky guy of maybe 14 with a dark mop of hair curly enough to rival Tib's yellow curls. He had reddish acne on his face and was wearing a rumpled gray wool sweater and narrow dark pants that were getting a little short for him, which made him look even taller and thinner than he was. "They were extra hungry, and luckily I caught extra fish, since my sister came along."

"Thanks," said Anker, saluting him. "I'll take my turn tomorrow. Todo, let me introduce you to Betsy and Tacy," he turned to hand-motion towards each of the girls. "You'll hardly believe it, but they're on a mission to walk from Deep Valley, Minnesota, to Milwaukee. I'll fill you in on their story later. The exciting news is that I think we can help them out and they can help us out by using our girls to fly them to Milwaukee, and then I'll be able to train them to fly home from there. It would really get us a giant step forward in being able to have a travel business and maybe even make some money."

Todo stood with one arm crossed over his chest and his other hand cupping his chin, tapping on his lip as he listened intently. His eyes narrowed and his brows furrowed as he thought quietly about what Anker had said. "Wow, I think that just might work. I like it, I like it, I like it. Great idea, partner!" He broke out into a big smile. "This will give us some great experience, and hopefully you'll have a really good flight and will tell a lot of people about it?" he looked questioningly at Betsy and Tacy.

Tacy nodded, and Betsy spoke, sounding sure at first, "of course we will. I could even write about it. If it works," she faltered. "I mean, if we live to tell about it."

Both boys nodded vigorously. "Of course you will!" said Todo, enthusiastically. "This will be a piece of cake. Once we get you flying up there, you'll love it. Seriously. We wouldn't do it ourselves if it wasn't totally safe."

Betsy and Tacy looked at each other nervously. They weren't so sure about that, since the boys they knew back at home were often daredevils willing to risk a lot more than they were. But the idea of how fast they could get to Milwaukee and get help for their families was very appealing. They could overcome their fears for that.

"Why don't we show them?" said Anker to Todo.

"Good idea," said Todo. Then Betsy and Tacy stood back and watched the boys go into action. Todo set about taking each pterodactyl outside and attaching each one of them to one of three wooden poles outside. He tied a rope-leash around their necks, and then, giving them a few feet of leash, tethered them to the poles. The dinosaurs looked strong enough to break away if they really wanted to, but they acted like good dogs and were happy enough to be outside and getting attention. And it seemed like they could sense that they'd get to fly soon. Anker set about gathering the seats and harnesses they'd made from another part of the barn. He carried them outside and then worked

with Todo to fasten one to each of the pterodactyls, who didn't seem to mind. The seats were made of wood, with a high back like a chair, and leather straps to hold the rider in, and leather straps and belts that went firmly around the pterodactyl. They tightened the belts, making sure the harnesses were secure and that the seats wouldn't slide. The boys looked very business-like and stern, very serious about their invention and making sure it was properly attached. And then, when they were done, Anker pointed to Todo, who nodded and set about climbing into the seat.

Anker helped him with the straps, and explained the proper procedure to Betsy and Tacy, who watched with stricken looks on their faces. Mitzy crouched down cooperatively as Todo got positioned and Anker pulled on the belts. Anker untied the rope from the dinosaur's neck, then stepped back and stood by Betsy and Tacy, away from Mitzy's wide flapping wings. Mitzy squawked excitedly, realizing she was free now, and her two sisters joined in, flapping their wings in camaraderie even though they wouldn't be flying. Todo patted her on her side, crouching down and forward a bit as Mitzy took a few steps forward and flapped her wings like huge fans. Betsy and Tacy's hearts thumped quickly and they held their breath as they watched Mitzy and Todo rising into the air.

It was like that moment all over again when Tib had managed to get a ride in the horseless carriage with Mr. and Mrs. Poppy, that magical moment when the carriage had started driving on its own, and the whole town had been excited by the miracle. That's what it felt like now for Betsy and Tacy, a person flying, actually flying through the air! Not just in a game of pretend, or in a story. Todo was actually flying!

He looked like he was having a blast, too, a big smile on his face as he went up and up. And then they couldn't tell anymore because he was high above the treetops, higher

than they'd even seen anything except a bird or dinosaur flying before. Mitzy soared and flapped and squawked, going in a wide circle. It all looked so freeing.

"Well, what do you think of that?" Anker asked. He turned to the girls to get their impressions. Both girls remembered to close their mouths -- they'd been gaping wide open at what they'd seen.

"I can hardly believe it," said Betsy. "It actually looks kind of fun. Still scary, but fun."

Tacy said, "I'm not so sure about the fun part yet. But it's amazing. Does he tell Mitzy where he wants to go?"

Anker smiled. "Yes, he is guiding Mitzy. We actually spent a long time training them with fish and hand signals to get them to follow where we point. We just put our hand out to signal which direction we want to go, and keep pointing down to get her to land. They really seem to want to be directed."

"Wow," said Betsy, feeling excited and scared at the same time. Tacy and I might actually do that, she thought, and then pushed the intimidating thought out of her head. Well, maybe tomorrow...

"So, which one of you wants to go first?" asked Anker, heading towards one of the other pterodactyls.

"What? Now?" asked Tacy in a high-pitched voice.

"No need to rush," said Betsy, gulping hard.

"But there's no reason to wait, either." Anker gave her an easy smile. "I know you two are eager to get to Milwaukee, to get help and figure out what happened to your families, so the sooner we do this, the sooner all that can happen. And for today, just

taking a flight to see how it goes would be good. Then we can talk about when we'd do the actual trip to Milwaukee."

Betsy and Tacy looked at each other with wide eyes. He was right. They wanted to get help for their families quickly. And flying seems like it would be the quickest of all.

Betsy grimly stepped forward. She knew that she would have to be the first one to fly; Tacy was more scared than she was, and she'd have to prove to Tacy that it was okay. She felt like she was walking the gangplank, and just had to put one foot in front of the other. "I'll do it."

Anker eagerly set about getting Fritzzy ready for Betsy-- Fritzzy was the gentlest one, he reminded them. That really didn't make Betsy feel a whole lot better. She stood paralyzed while Anker got the seat and harness, started strapping up the pterodactyl. Todo came in for a landing, and once out of his seat, he helped too. He got Ditzzy ready for Anker to ride. Anker would ride Ditzzy alongside Betsy and Fritzzy. He would help her out and train her in on how to fly.

Soon Tacy was hugging Betsy and whispering some encouraging words in her ear that Betsy barely heard, and then Betsy was sitting on the wooden seat up on Fritzzy, like being on a horse. Anker explained all the signals to her, said he would be just a few feet away and would help her, and then he was up on Ditzzy. Todo held down Fritzzy until it was time for take-off. Anker gave Betsy a nod and did a countdown, and then he took off, and Fritzzy ran a few steps behind him and before she knew it, Betsy was lifting off the ground on the back of a pterodactyl!

Her stomach lurched as the ground fell away, and she closed her eyes for a minute. She felt the wind on her face and the up and down flapping of Fritzzy's powerful wings. It was a strange feeling of a new kind of movement, gliding and smoothly sailing

forward. She peeked open her eyes and then flashed them open. They were now higher than the treetops, into the sky, with Anker and Ditzzy just a few feet ahead of them. He looked back at her and gave a wicked grin of excitement, and she couldn't help herself--she gave him a big smile. Her hands were gripping the leather harness on the back of Fritzzy's neck tightly, but she had to admit it was exhilarating, like nothing she'd ever felt before. So far and so fast!

They only flew for about 10 minutes that first time. Anker led her, shouting instructions to her about turning right or left, going up or down, having her practice until she felt like she could do it. They circled and soared and then, it was time to land. He guided her through that too, though it seemed Fritzzy was pretty good at doing it all on her own. They landed with a thump and Fritzzy running forward on her legs until she could stop. And then, Todo was there to help her get unbuckled and hop down to the ground. It felt funny to have her feet on the solid ground now.

Tacy still looked apprehensive. "It looked like you were having fun?"

"Ohhhh, once I got over the being scared part, it was a lot of fun. Now I know what a bird feels like," Betsy said.

"Or a flying dinosaur," said Anker. He turned to Tacy. "And now you, Miss? Fritzzy would love to take you for a spin too."

Tacy's lips trembled. "She must be tired. I could wait..."

"Oh no," laughed Anker. "She's just gotten started. Remember, she's certainly strong enough to make a flight to Milwaukee, so she can easily handle two short flights."

Now Betsy gave Tacy the reassuring hug while Tacy grew pale and quiet. She was shaking but she bravely stepped up to the chair and harness, getting strapped in. And then, in just a moment, Tacy was flying too, sitting stiff in the chair, but then like Betsy,

gradually opening her eyes and having some fun. Betsy was happy to see that Tacy had found the enjoyment in flying, too. What would they have done if Tacy had just been too scared and refused to fly? Walking all the way to Milwaukee was going to take an exhausting and laboriously long time.

Once they were back on the ground and Tacy had jumped off Fritzzy's back with her eyes shining with excitement, they all went about helping to take the harnesses and seats off, take the dinosaurs back to the barn, get everything put away and settled for the evening. Todo had to get going home and waved goodbye, and then Anker told the girls that they could come back to the church-house with him. "I'm sure the Fords will welcome you, and they'll make sure you are fed and have a place to stay for the night. Then, if I can manage it, we could take off tomorrow for Milwaukee. Like I said, the sooner the better for you, I think."

"You're right," said Betsy. "But you don't have to bother the Fords. We could just stay in the barn tonight."

"Gee, no! Mrs. Ford would scold me severely if I let you two do that. She considers it part of her mission to welcome those in need and help them. They're both great people, and they'd be glad to help."

The three of them walked back along the road, back to the church, and then into the cottage next door. Anker took them in the front door, and Betsy had a panicked moment of worrying how they looked: dirty from travel, clothes dusty, and hair wind-blown from flying. But there was nothing to do about it, except reaching up to smooth down her braided hair.

There was a short, round, pretty woman in the kitchen, setting the table for dinner. She turned to see when they came in the door, gave Anker and smile and a

gentle, questioning glance at the guests. She had warm brown eyes, and walked towards them. "Anker, almost time for supper. And who did you bring to join us?"

"Mrs. Ford, these girls are Betsy and Tacy from Deep Valley, Minnesota." Anker motioned towards them, pointing out which girl was which. "They stopped in La Crosse this afternoon, visited the church, and that's how I got to meet them. They're on quite a journey. We can tell you about it over supper."

Mrs. Ford nodded. "I'll put two more plates on the table then. We're glad to have you join us. Why don't you show them the wash room, Anker? I'm sure you could all use some washing up if he's been showing you his pterodactyls, as I'm sure he was."

Betsy and Tacy were relieved to get to spend some time cleaning up before going to the table. They were looking forward to sitting down for a meal with Anker his family. But they were also a little apprehensive, never knowing how grownups would react to their plans.

When they were ready, they went downstairs, smelling a tantalizing aroma of beef stew and fresh bread. Little Sammy Ford, 9-months-old, was sitting in his wooden high chair, banging with a wooden spoon on his tray. Mrs. Ford was still puttering in the kitchen, and said they could sit down. Reverend Ford came in just as she was bringing the big steaming soup crock to the table. He was tall and lean but strong looking, bearded like Abe Lincoln.

"You're right on time, dear. Supper is ready, and Anker has two guests tonight." Mrs. Ford set down the heavy pottery. "We have Betsy and Tacy from Deep Valley, and that's about all I know. I'm looking forward to hearing their story as we eat."

The minister's mouth curved up into a small smile as his eyes looked piercingly at each of them. He then sent a questioning look toward his foster son. "It's not often we

have such young guests at our table. Let's offer our thanks, and then we want to hear all about it."

Betsy and Tacy bowed their head as the minister said grace, words directed to an unnamed source in gratitude for the meal and the blessings of life. It was different than what they would usually hear from a Baptist minister or a Catholic priest. It was nice.

Then there was small talk and chatter as Mrs. Ford had them pass their bowls to be filled with the savory and fragrant stew. Milk was poured into their glasses, bread and butter were passed around too. Sammy continued to bang on his high chair tray while intermittently biting a slice of buttered bread.

When everyone had their food, then Minister Ford gave a friendly smile to Betsy and Tacy, who sat on one long side of the table. "So, how did you girls come to be with us in La Crosse today?"

Betsy and Tacy exchanged nervous glances. They were never quite sure how their fantastical story would be taken. Betsy sighed. As usual, she would be doing the honors of speaking for them, and Tacy would fill in details when she felt comfortable doing it. So she began, all the way back in Deep Valley with Horace B. Lester and his amazing and horrible tyrannosaurus coming to town.

Anker had not heard the story in its entirety yet, and he sat with his mouth open, putting down his spoon on the table. Betsy had the rapt attention of everyone except Sammy, who was telling a story of his own, maybe an imitation of his preacher father.

"Wow," breathed Anker when she had finished. "I know it was awful to live through, but it must've been amazing to see a T. rex on the loose."

"It was like a nightmare coming to life," said Tacy. "Most of the time I just wanted to shut my eyes and hope when I opened them again I would wake up."

Mrs. Ford shuddered and clutched her napkin to her throat. "You poor girls! Not only did you have to face that monster, but then to discover the town in shambles and everyone gone. How brave and smart you were, to try to get help the only way you could think of. But what a long journey to take all alone!"

Minister Ford's voice was stern. "I must admit, I'm very worried for you girls. This is much too far for you to go on your own. Why, you've only completed just a fraction of the trip so far, and you've been lucky to not have run into any foul play so far. The world is not an easy place, and two young girls shouldn't go out into it alone. There must be another solution."

Anker cleared his throat. "Sir, we've already come up with one." He explained about using the pterodactyls to get the girls to Milwaukee faster.

The minister slammed down his spoon at the idea. "Son, you know I'm not crazy about you flying those dinosaurs around. I certainly don't condone a long flight for these girls. This is a very dangerous proposition. I won't allow it."

Anker pushed back his chair, stepped away from the table and began pacing back and forth. Betsy and Tacy felt an unhappy tightness in their chests, watching this conflict brewing.

"With all due respect, sir, you don't know what you're talking about. Sure, there are risks in us flying to Milwaukee, but there are surely more risks in Betsy and Tacy continuing to walk there, taking at least another month to do that. Meanwhile, we don't know what kind of peril their families and their town is in. Surely faster is better. I've ridden these pterodactyls almost every day for many months. I haven't felt any danger in riding them yet. And you haven't tried it yet."

Mrs. Ford cleared her throat. "You know your father has a big fear of heights."

Betsy noted that she'd called the minister Anker's father, which was a nice touch. But now she was worried that they might not be able to go ahead with Anker's plan. Sure, she was afraid of flying all the way there, but it was appealing to think they could be there in just a few days.

"I can't allow it," said the minister with finality. "If anything happened to any of you kids --" he nodded once to each of the three of them, "-- I'd never forgive myself. We could see if we could somehow gather enough money for the train."

Anker grew louder. "You know I've been wanting to use my pterodactyls for a business! This is a perfect chance. And it's free. It's safer than you believe. And, and, and... you've all been so good to me since my father died, but I'm going to be all alone in the world someday. I'm going to need money and a way to support myself. This might work for me. Don't take it away from me!" He gave the minister a look of anguish.

Mrs. Ford jumped up and rushed to give the boy an embrace. "We won't let you be alone in the world, dear. You'll always belong to us, from now on."

He buried his face in her shoulder for a moment, then straightened up. He looked at her with gratitude. "Thank you, so much, for everything. Both of you. I know you'll be there for me. But don't take this away from me. It's important to me. I know it will work."

There was a long silence now. Nobody was eating anymore. Everyone seemed deep in thought, wrestling with reality and many layers of feelings.

After a while, the minister turned to Betsy and Tacy, and quietly asked how they felt about it.

"I'm nervous about flying, Minister Ford, but Anker took both of us out for a trial flight, and it wasn't bad."

Tacy nodded. "Even though I'm afraid, it did seem safe, and I like how fast it will get us to Milwaukee. I trust you, Anker. You've flown a lot, and I think you know what you're doing." She gave the boy a smile, and he nodded back with a glow in his eyes.

Minister Ford leaned his face into his hands, covering his face, obviously deeply troubled. He seemed to be muttering to himself into his hands. Then he looked up, engaging with all of them. "I know I could put my foot down and forbid you to do this flight. There is a frightened side of me that wants nothing more than to do that. But deep in my gut, or a little whisper to my soul, something is telling me to not stand in the way. I hope I'm not wrong in listening to it. I do strongly suspect that even if I said no, you three would do it anyway. So, I won't stand in your way." He did not look relieved to say this.

But Anker and Betsy and Tacy did look relieved, and in fact, were very pleased. "Thank you so much, sir!" said Betsy. "We didn't want to have to go against you. It's much better to have your approval, even if you hesitate."

Tacy looked a mixture of terrified and happy. Anker looked positively radiant. He approached his father. "Thank you so much, sir. You won't regret it, I promise."

The two men, one young and one old, stood looking at each other for a moment. Betsy guessed that physical expressions of their emotions didn't come easy to them, not like with Mrs. Ford. After a moment, the minister spread open his arms and welcomed the boy into a fierce embrace. Anker responded just as fiercely with a tight hug.

Now the only dry eye in the house was Sammy, who babbled on happily, as if giving a commentary of his own on the situation.

Everyone sat down and finished their half-eaten bowls of soup, refreshing with more hot stew from the pot, and getting more bread. Plans were created, with the idea

being that there was no reason for the three kids to not leave the next day. The sooner the better, they agreed. Everyone would have a job to do to get them ready. Mrs. Ford would pack the most compact food and water bundles for them. They wouldn't be able to carry much with them. Betsy and Tacy would likewise sort through their belongings and decide what was essential for their journey, for they would have to leave most of it behind. Minister Ford would help to make sure the dinosaurs would have a large meal before they left. He would get some meat from the butcher and do some fishing early in the day. And Anker would get help from Todo to prepare the dinosaurs for the flight, making sure the harnesses were in tip-top shape, figuring out the best way to carry the supply bundles they'd need to take with them, making sure of the route on a map and taking a compass.

Betsy and Tacy offered to help with dishes, but Mrs. Ford shooed them away, saying they'd need good rest for their journey. They did spend a little while playing with Sammy while Mrs. Ford did the cleanup. He was a funny little guy, very talkative in his baby babble and just starting to pull himself up to standing. Betsy followed Tacy's lead in playing with him, since Tacy was really good with babies and little kids.

Everyone went to bed, then, and Betsy and Tacy were once again grateful to have a bed to sleep in, a trundle bed wheeled into the parlor. They tried not to think about their big flight the next day. This was all just a strange and unusual adventure, with a lot of strange and unusual things to get used to. Or get through. For now, they would just get a good night of comfortable sleep.

The next morning was busy, with everyone doing their assigned tasks. Todo and Anker were deep in discussions, taking their roles as entrepreneurs and pilots very

seriously. Betsy noted they were as serious and engaged as any grownup could be. That gave her some comfort. They did seem to know what they were doing.

By early afternoon, all tasks were done, and Anker, Betsy and Tacy prepared for their departure. They were given warm, caring embraces, prayers and blessings, and looks of concern. Minister Ford held Baby Sammy, Mrs. Ford held her hands clasped at her chest, and Todo got the three travelers strapped into their seats and harnesses while Ditzzy, Mitzy and Fritzzy flapped their wings in anticipation. After nods exchanged between Anker, Betsy and Tacy to show that they were ready, they were off!

Chapter 8: Betsín and Tacín Fly

It was a nice day for flying, Betsy thought to herself as she gripped the high bars of the wooden seat firmly, her braids flying, and then she chuckled. That was a phrase she never anticipated saying before, yet here she was, flying through the air like a bird. It was still a little scary and unsettling, to be so high in the sky, but it was also exhilarating. She made mental notes of details and feelings to write down later. She definitely wanted to be able to write about this experience.

She was glad Anker and Todo had insisted on all of them bundling up for the ride. The fall day was sunny and mild, but once they were in the air and flying, the whoosh of the wind as they flew was pretty cold. Betsy and Tacy were wearing all the clothing they brought with them underneath their coats, making them look like fat sausages. She let go of her grip with one hand to tug her hat down over her ears. And then she looked over at Tacy, who was flying on the other side of Anker (they were flying in a triangle formation, like geese, so they could follow Anker's lead). Tacy looked terrified, holding on with a tight death-grip with both hands, and Betsy understood she wasn't going to let go anytime soon. So Tacy gave her a pained smile and nodded her head vigorously at Betsy. It was so comforting to have Tacy flying so near.

Betsy took a moment to take in the dinosaur beneath her. She was flying Mitzy, while Anker flew Ditzzy and Tacy had Fritzzy, who Anker always said was the gentlest of the three. That seemed a good fit for Tacy, and at least made her feel a little less anxious, just a smidgen. The pterodactyls were brownish gray, and Betsy watched the leathery skin tighten and ripple beneath her as the massive wings beat up and down like giant leaves. Mitzy seemed happy to be up in the air, oblivious to the fact that Betsy was

traveling on her back. There was the long, thin neck jutting forward just underneath Betsy's feet, and then the pointy angular head surveying the sky and the land as they went, with a sharp cry from the beak every now and then, which was often echoed by a responding cry from Fritzzy or Ditzzy.

She looked past the dinosaur now to the ground speeding past below them. All the houses and buildings and trees and roads looked so small from way up here. She wondered how fast they were going. This was truly a miraculous way to travel, so much faster than she and Tacy had been able to do on their own, walking step by step. Even so much faster than a horse and buggy, and probably even one of those horseless carriages. Betsy had occasionally seen stories in the paper about men who tried to fly, in flying machines they made. That had sounded crazy to her, and she'd even wondered why anyone would want to do something like that. And now, flying along on the back of a pterodactyl, she could understand the desire, and even the practical side of it. Flying was so fast!

After the first half hour, she didn't think she would ever tire of flying, even though it wasn't set up for comfort. It wasn't uncomfortable, but you were strapped in and very aware of your body while flying. The wind was cool, cold or bitter, depending on the weather (so Anker had told them). Instead of being in a temperature-controlled environment like a train, you were out in the elements when flying on a pterodactyl. You felt the wind, its temperature and its gustiness. Betsy doubted anyone could fall asleep while flying. Besides the fact that you were out in the open and feeling every bit of the weather you were flying through, you were always aware of how far off the ground you were. All Betsy's senses were heightened, not to mention the steady thrum of adrenaline in her veins. She did find she was relaxing just a bit. It was actually just too difficult to

be holding on with all her might to the harness and keeping her body stiff with alertness. It was too difficult to maintain this tension in her body constantly, and gradually she relaxed. She still held firmly onto the harness, but her back rested against the back of the seat, and she let out a heavy sigh.

Betsy looked up ahead at Anker, who was leading them. He had a leather cap on his head, but some of his stick straight brown hair was sticking out at the sides. Mrs. Ford had wrapped a thick and long scarf around his neck about 10 times, and now the ends were flying in the wind slightly behind him. Her face had looked worried, her eyebrows pinched tight, but her eyes were loving and brave. Betsy was so glad that Anker had these new parents in his life that loved him. She couldn't imagine being on her own in the world with no family, no loving circle around her. It was something she'd always taken for granted. All the kids she knew had families and plenty of support. And even beyond her family, Betsy knew she had neighbors who cared for her, the families of her friends knew her and cared for her, her cousins and uncles and aunts. And even her teachers, and the people in the town. She had quite a large supportive community around her.

Well, she used to, at least. Betsy had the sobering realization that her supportive family and community had suddenly disappeared, and she didn't really know if that was permanent or not. She really hoped with all her heart that Tacy and she would be able to solve the mystery, with the help of Tib and Mr. Muller. She fervently hoped and prayed that this disappearance was completely temporary, just a mystery to solve. Thinking all this, and realizing that she might be in a very similar situation to Anker, made her feel very tenderly toward this boy. They had only known him such a short amount of time, just over a day, could it be? But already she had a sense of knowing what a good heart he

had. He was strong and independent, determined to find his way in the world in a way that most 12-year-olds didn't have to or choose to think about. He was funny and smart and industrious, willing to work hard for what he wanted. He was admirable, and Betsy was so grateful they had stumbled upon him. Like many things about this adventure they were on, finding Anker was a gift, as well as all the people they'd met along the way so far. She and Tacy were certainly lucky.

Now Betsy turned to look at her friend, who was bravely flying on Fritz off to her left on the other side of Anker. Tacy was wearing a thick warm knitted cap that Mrs. Ford had given her, and her red ringlets were flying out back behind her, similar to Anker's long red scarf. Tacy was sitting up rigidly, her grip on the harness still tight. She was staring straight ahead, almost in a trance, and Betsy wondered if she really was in a trance. Maybe it was like when she and Tib and Tacy had tried to hypnotize Winona into giving them tickets for the play Uncle Tom's Cabin last year. They'd each stared at Winona with big eyes, thinking (and sometimes even whispering out loud) "Take us take us take us." They'd done it all day, even in class, even at recess, but it had only creeped Winona out and she'd said she wouldn't take anyone who was acting weird and staring at her like that. They'd ended up getting to go with her anyway, but only after they'd decided that getting tickets from Winona was hopeless and they set about planning to perform their own play, to be performed when Uncle Tom's Cabin was showing. They'd started to having so much fun planning the play and practicing that Winona got pulled in, and wanted to be in it. Eventually, they'd worked out a plan that she would give them the tickets and she could be in the play, but they were all so excited by seeing the actual play of Uncle Tom's Cabin, that they never ended up performing the substitute play.

They put on other plays at other times, and Winona had parts in those (she was very good at being melodramatic, which fit in with Betsy's writing style).

And now Tacy was staring straight ahead. Betsy suspected if she was trying to hypnotize anyone it was herself, maybe saying, "Please keep Fritzzy flying. Please don't let me fall. Please keep us safe." Betsy had been concentrating on thoughts like that for the first half hour, too, but now she was relaxing a bit, able to look around and try to enjoy the ride. She couldn't really control it; she had had to put her trust in Mitzy and Anker that everything would be all right, but outside of that, she couldn't do much about it. She and Tacy had made the decision to fly, to try to get to Milwaukee faster. It was a trade-off. There was more safety in walking, though maybe that was just the illusion of safety because it felt like they had more control over it. There were all sorts of dangers in walking, actually, running into unsafe people or situations, running out of food or water, and as it gets colder, being outside in the bitter midwestern weather. It might even get too cold for them to be outside for long. Flying would be much faster and avoid the rigors of walking. Besides, they could get help for their families much quicker this way. And that was certainly worth the risk.

Betsy kept looking at Tacy, hoping her friend would look over at her. That would be a great comfort to them both. But Tacy was entranced, still holding on so fiercely with both her hands and her gaze. She didn't turn her head. She certainly couldn't fault her friend for that. Tacy was way more frightened of flying than Betsy (and Betsy was pretty scared, too). Betsy couldn't even at this point think of raising her hand to wave at Tacy to try and get her attention. Holding on to the halter felt imperative. So even though she was relaxing a bit and able to look around, she was still holding tight, as if her grip was what was keeping her and Mitzy up in the air.

With a deep sigh, Betsy shook out her shoulders and arms (while still holding on) and allowed herself to look around and down. Her stomach was getting used to being up here so high. It had been doing flip flops and somersaults for a while, whenever she peeked and looked down. But now she was getting somewhat used to it (she wasn't sure she would ever really get used to it, but time would tell. Anker certainly seemed used to it by now). The ground below her seemed like an endless carpet. Occasionally there were swaths of green, but since it was deep into Fall now, there were more shades of pale tan to dark brown, depending on the land. Some farm fields looked tan from the dried remains of corn plants or hay or straw. Some dark green still showed in grassy areas, though some of the grass was now dried and brown. Evergreens dotted the surface here and there, and sometimes there were large patches of them all together, an evergreen forest. Some trees still had leaves clinging to their branches, shimmering with browns and golds, orange and red.

There were long dark lines running in some places, roads where these new automobiles drove, or the old horse and carriages. Betsy especially enjoyed seeing the crooked lines of rivers and streams, or the dark surfaces of ponds or lakes. Lakes made her feel at home, and rivers always made her feel like traveling. The Minnesota River ran through Deep Valley, and she often imagined hopping on a boat or a raft and traveling down the river, letting the current take her wherever it went. She would have her books and her notebooks and pencils with her, and a splendid picnic that would last her for days. She would sit in the boat and write fascinating stories, waving to the people along the shores as she went, giving a friendly nod to other boats on the river, who might look surprised to see a girl writer in a boat by herself, but they would nod back approvingly, respectfully. She would ride the Minnesota River until it connected with the Mississippi

River near St. Paul, and then she could ride the Mississippi as far as she felt like. How far south would she feel like going? That would depend. She could follow her whims. She might go all the way down to the Mississippi River delta to the Gulf of Mexico (that sounded so poetic), or maybe she'd stop in Illinois or Kentucky or somewhere, and explore these new places. Were they like Minnesota at all, or completely different? She would someday find out.

She was surprised by all the hills in Wisconsin. Minnesota always seemed so flat in its terrain (except a few places like Deep Valley, with its dramatic hills), but Wisconsin had rolling hills that were quite lovely. Betsy and Tacy both had a fondness for hills. It made Wisconsin seem like a friendlier place.

As they flew, sometimes they came across other flying creatures, who never seemed surprised in the least to see them there. There were other pterosaurs (the proper name for pterodactyls) of different sizes, like pterodactylus, which were more the size of a large bird). They saw a few other pteranodons, which were what Mitzy, Fritzy and Ditzzy were. They even saw a coloborhynchus, much larger than pteranodons. They did not see a nemicolopterus crypticus (a very small bird-like flying dinosaur) or the very large quetzalcoatlus northropi, which were rarer.

It was funny how the schools had really had to change their curriculum once dinosaurs came back from extinction. Previously, schools barely mentioned dinosaurs as a part of history, and now there were whole units devoted to learning about dinosaurs, especially the ones that were now commonly seen in their daily lives. Children learned these long names and built dinosaur models out of paper and flour and water and wrote reports. Some teachers gave them a break on the spelling of these long tricky names. But

Betsy was surprised at how much was sticking in her head, as she saw the various flying dinosaurs go by.

Birds flew by as well. Betsy loved watching the birds from this new perspective, as a peer really, one of them, flying through the air. She noticed how their wings moved as they passed her by. Once a flock of geese came up and flew alongside them for a while, honking and working their short wings so hard. I've flown with geese!, thought Betsy. It was rather exciting to think about.

Anker looked back on them every once in a while, and of course he was comfortable enough flying that he could easily, casually turn around and wave. He nodded questioningly, wanting to know if they were doing okay. Betsy smiled and nodded vigorously at him, yes, she was okay, doing fine. He then turned around the other way to wave at Tacy, who at first didn't notice. Betsy watched, wanting to see some sign of life from her friend, wanting to know she was okay. She didn't want this to be a traumatic experience for Tacy, one that would scar her for life. Anker waved in a bigger arc, and finally Tacy startled a bit and turned her head. She stared at him for a moment, blinking her eyes, and then she pursed her lips, not smiling and looking cheerful like Betsy, but she seriously nodded her head back at him, continuing to hold on with her death grip to the harness. Anker turned back around, and finally, what Betsy had been waiting for, Tacy turned to look over at her. Betsy gave her a big, comforting smile. Tacy's eyes were big and she opened her mouth in an expression of "ack! What are we doing? This is crazy!" Betsy shrugged her shoulders and smiled back. She hoped Tacy got her message, the one she was sending with her eyes: It's okay. We're going to be okay. We'll get through this together.

After about four hours of flying, Anker signaled back to Betsy and Tacy that it was time to take a break. Pterodactyls can normally fly faster on their own, but the increased weight of their passengers slowed the dinosaurs down to about 15 miles per hour. The plan (according to Anker, who had planned out the flight with Todo, with maps and compasses and other strange tools that Betsy didn't know about) was to fly half the distance today, and half tomorrow. To think of it, they could be in Milwaukee tomorrow night! This was an amazing thought, after Betsy and Tacy had calculated on their own, without any fancy tools at all, that it would take them about 36 days to walk such a distance on their own.

Betsy and Tacy followed Anker's lead, as he signaled for Ditzzy to land, and Betsy did the same for Mitzy and Tacy did the same for Fritzzy. It was a little scary to think about. What if something went wrong with the landing? The dinosaurs gradually started slanting downward, then came the thump and the running of their feet as they slowed down their speed and then miraculously, came to a stop. Betsy gave out a cheer and Tacy heaved a huge sigh of relief. Anker helped them out of their harnesses and they stepped cautiously to the ground. It felt funny to feel the weight of their bodies on the earth again; they felt heavy for the first few minutes, like after getting out of the lake after swimming. They had landed in an open, dry grassy field, about a half-mile from a town.

They needed to have an open space to land and rest the pterodactyls for a bit. Then they would walk into town and see about some shelter for the night. It was already starting to get dark, though. Anker and Betsy and Tacy started to talk it over, how to do all this when they couldn't just leave the dinosaurs in the field. "Why don't you two go

into town, find out where we've landed, and see about finding some shelter. Even just a barn or a shed would work," said Anker.

Betsy and Tacy looked at each other. They weren't crazy about trying to knock on doors to find shelter, but they'd had to do a lot of things they didn't want to on this trip. At least they had each other to go with.

They walked away from Anker, who was taking the harnesses off Ditzzy, Fritzzy and Mitzy and using rope to tie them to a strong tree, with a little leash for leeway. They walked down a hard-packed dirt road toward a small town with low buildings up ahead. They could hear a river off to the left. Dusk made the air look dark and smoky, and the town had a stillness about it. Downtown Deep Valley would still be busy at this time of evening, with people coming and going, maybe to the Melborn Hotel, to a play at the Opera House, young people gathering at Heinz's for ice cream and fun. But this town had an emptiness about it.

Betsy and Tacy were walking slowly, maybe in avoidance of the necessity of doing something that might make them uncomfortable. Betsy realized this and knew they should hurry before it got any darker, so she quickened her pace and Tacy startled a moment then quickened too. They squeezed hands for courage. They followed the dirt road into town on what appeared to be the main street. There were low square buildings, some made of brick, some made of wood, with storefront windows and signs. Some had porches out front. This appeared to be the business side of town. There were signs saying, "Johnson's Fine Foods," "Penn Apothecary," "Mrs. B's Books," and "R. J., Barber." The lights were off in most buildings, though some had second floors with lights on upstairs, probably the living quarters.

"I wish we knew where we were," said Tacy. "It's so quiet here."

"Yeah," said Betsy. "It doesn't seem like anyone would answer if we knocked on these doors. Everything's closed."

They continued to walk and came to a small house nestled between what appeared to be a church and a candy store. There was a light on in the front, glowing behind the curtained windows. As Betsy and Tacy came upon it, they saw the curtain move and a little old face with glasses scowling and frowning at them. It looked at them with questioning and disapproving eyes. Tacy gasped. It was rather startling to see someone peering at them, and they stopped and just looked for a moment. And then the curtain moved and covered the window again. They thought this person might come out then, to see what they were doing, who they were, but they stood in front of this little house and... nothing.

Betsy and Tacy turned to look at the front door up the porch steps to the front house. Nothing. They turned and looked at each other, surprised and questioning. Betsy shrugged and pulled Tacy forward so they both walked up the wooden steps. It seemed weird that this man would see them and not poke his head out to see what was up. But they needed to talk to someone, so Betsy knocked medium-oud on the door three times. No answer. She knocked again and called out, "Please, sir, we just need to ask you a question. Please talk to us."

There was a curtain on the front door, covering four small panes of glass. First the girls saw fingers grasping at the white cloth, then the curtain moved aside and the same wrinkled scowling face peered out at them. Tacy jumped a little, and the girls squeezed hands hard. "What do you two want?" the deep voice boomed, muffled by the closed door. This was not a happy man.

Betsy was the spokesperson, as usual. "Please, sir, I'm so sorry to bother you, but we are travelers and we've just come to town. We need some place to stay for the night, out of the elements. I know this is a lot to ask and it's so late in the day, but do you know of anyone with a barn or a shed where we and our companions could stay the night? We don't ask for any special accommodations, just shelter from the weather."

She paused then, and tried to look as sweet and needy and nonthreatening as she could. She knew Tacy was already doing it, because that was Tacy's natural state.

The old man kept frowning, seemed to be thinking. If nothing else, he seemed to be intrigued by them. Finally he spat out, "Two little girls? How could you be travelers. Is it just you two traveling alone? On foot?"

"No sir," said Betsy. "We have a boy with us who is our age. We traveled on foot for a few days, but he has three pterodactyls that he's trained to fly with passengers, so now we're flying on them."

The old man's eyes bulged out of his head, and then he swung open the door. He was short, just about a head taller than the girls, slight and hunched shouldered, wearing a dark jacket and tie with a white shirt. Round wire glasses framed his burning eyes. His wiry gray hair stood up in tufts on the sides of his head, and he was balding on top. There were many wrinkles lining his face. He sputtered, "You FLEW? On pterodactyls? Surely not!"

This time Tacy spoke up. "Yes indeed, sir, we did. We flew from La Crosse today." She nodded her head as punctuation.

The man seemed speechless. He tugged at the sleeves of his jacket and shook his head. "I don't believe it. I don't believe it."

Betsy and Tacy just paused, letting the man mutter to himself. It didn't seem wise to contradict him, or try to convince him. He was a very odd man.

"Where are these dinosaurs you flew on?" he asked. "And there's a boy, too?"

"Yes," said Betsy. "He's our friend Anker, who trains pterodactyls for flight, and wants to have a travel business using them someday."

The man gulped, then whispered, "What was it like? The flying?"

"It's like nothing else," said Betsy. "We went so fast and were so high up. We felt like birds, didn't we Tacy?"

Tacy nodded. "I was afraid, but it was breathtaking to see the world go by from up there." She pointed to the sky.

The man got a dreamy look on his face and smiled. It was such a change, to see him go from a crabby sour apple face to looking like a boy with a dream.

"Can I see them? Can I talk to your friend? I've been such a fan of flying ever since I was a boy about your age and got to ride in a hot air balloon. I've never forgotten that feeling. I've been following those Wright Brothers and I was so excited when they got their flying machine to work. They call it an aero-plane!" He was rubbing his hands together, looking younger and younger all the time with his animated face. It was Betsy and Tacy's turn to stare at him. They had never seen such a remarkable change in a person.

He excused himself to go get an overcoat on, and was hurriedly banging around the house while the girls waited on the porch. Then he came out, closing the door behind him and started quickly down the steps. The girls followed him, and then he abruptly stopped. And sighed.

"Please pardon me, young ladies. I've been remiss in all my excitement and I haven't introduced myself to you at all, and I don't even know your names either. My name is Arthur Harley, and I'm a jeweler with a shop down the street. But if I had my way, I would work with the Wright Brothers to make long flights on aero-planes possible." He nodded at them, so they began their own introductions.

"Hello Mr. Harley. My name is Betsy Ray, and this is my friend Tacy Kelly. We're both from Deep Valley, Minnesota, and we're on a journey to Milwaukee. We met Anker a few days ago, and he's the one who's helping us to fly on pterodactyls so we can get there faster."

Mr. Harley stuck out his hand and they all shook hands. "It's nice to meet you, Betsy and Tacy. I'm sorry if I wasn't very friendly when I was looking out the window. I've become a curmudgeon since my dear wife Clara passed on five years ago. Sometimes I just keep to myself and don't want to be bothered. But you reminded me of my passion for flying, and that pushed me out of the sour mood I was in. I am grateful to you."

Betsy and Tacy beamed back at him. Then Tacy pointed down the street. "Let us show you the way, sir. Anker will be happy to meet you."

Betsy and Tacy walked along with Mr. Harley, leading him back down the street. It was getting dark now, night settling in to the little town, which Mr. Harley informed them was Portage, Wisconsin. He told them about the Wisconsin and Fox Rivers that run on each side of Portage, coming within two miles of each other, and the lowlands between the rivers where explorers used to portage between the two close rivers.

"What's 'portage?'" asked Tacy.

"Portaging is when someone is boating on a river or lake, then approaches land and carries their canoe to another lake or river. And that's what explorers used to do, carry their canoes to go between the Fox and Wisconsin Rivers. It must've been so common for this to happen here that they named the town Portage," explained Mr. Harley.

Just this simple bit of geography got Betsy's imagination going. "I remember when we learned about the French-Canadian Voyageurs in history. It always reminds me of Grandma Slade's stories, remember, Tacy? She had all kinds of stories with Indians and Voyageurs and early settlers in Minnesota." Betsy could imagine herself as a female explorer, wearing braids and buckskin and furs, paddling a canoe on one of the mighty rivers, eating fish. It was a fun fantasy. But actually, now that she thought of it, not far off from the kind of adventure she and Tacy were having now.

Tacy nodded. "I sure hope Grandma Slade is okay." Which prompted Betsy to give Mr. Harley a brief summary of what had happened in Deep Valley and why they were trying to get to Milwaukee as quickly as possible. Mr. Harley listened with rapt attention.

"I always thought these dinosaurs coming back was bound to be no good. That's terrible, a Tyrannosaurus rex destroying a whole town! Things were so much more peaceful before they arrived." Mr. Harley shook his fist in frustration.

Betsy started slowly, trying to figure out her opinion as she went along. "It sure seems like there are both good things and bad things about the dinosaurs coming back. It's kind of a miracle that we get to see what these creatures are really like, not just read about them in history books where they seem more magical than real. Reading about dinosaurs is like reading about the Greek Gods. They make a good story, but they seem

imaginary, like fables and fairy tales. But now we see what they really are, and we get to experience them, to learn about them up close. Yes, they're dangerous and destructive, but then you see someone like Anker who's using the pterodactyls to fly. That's something good and positive. Maybe being able to ride pterodactyls will help people like the Wright Brothers to really get a flying machine working. We just don't know. It might be a good thing about the dinosaurs."

Betsy looked over at Mr. Harley, who seemed to be taking it in. He nodded, seeming to at least take in some of what she was saying. "You're a wise little girl, you know that?" he said with a smile. "And I guess we really don't have a choice right now. The dinosaurs are here. We've got to learn to live with them, and good for your friend who is trying to do something good with the beasts."

Now they reached the clearing beyond town, a flat grassland that was sparsely populated with trees. Anker had taken the harnesses off the girls and tied them to the tree. Fritzzy, Ditzzy and Mitzy seemed tiredly content, squatting on the ground and resting. Anker had been sitting on the ground nearby, and now as he saw them approach he stood up and waved. Betsy and Tacy waved back.

When they were close, Betsy said, "Anker, this is Mr. Harley, a jeweler from the town of Portage. Mr. Harley, this is Anker Turtlemap, in the travel business with flying pterodactyls."

Anker held out his hand, always a good young businessman. "Good to meet you, Mr. Harley. It's kind of you to come out when it's this late and give us a hand."

Mr. Harley shook firmly. "At first I was a little reluctant when these two knocked at my door, but when they told me about flying on pterodactyls, I had to come see. As I

was telling Betsy and Tacy, I'm a big fan of the Wright Brothers and their experiments with flying machines and aero-planes. But here you've found another way. Fascinating!"

Anker then lit up and motioned the old man to come over and see the trio of dinosaurs. The two men, one young and one old, became their own little huddle, talking and exclaiming and sharing ideas and examining the dinosaurs, and Betsy and Tacy just plopped on the ground and let them have their fun. It was the meeting of two minds who shared a passion for something. It was a nice moment.

After Mr. Harley had thoroughly examined the harnesses and petted the dinosaurs and asked a million questions and talked about his hot air balloon ride (which Anker was thrilled to hear about), Mr. Harley clapped his hands together and turned to face them all. "I would be delighted to help such a fine group of youth tonight. I have a small barn where you're welcome to bring the dinosaurs and stay for the night. Unfortunately, I don't have much room in my house. One or two of you could sleep on my couch or in an arm chair, but I don't have room for all of you." He looked a bit sad to tell them that.

"Mr. Harley, that's wonderful! You are an angel to help us. And I think sleeping in the barn will be fun, if you might have some blankets to spare. We are ever so grateful," said Betsy enthusiastically. She had wondered if they'd find anyone who might let them have some shelter, and she had never expected to find houses and beds that they could sleep in on this journey. They'd already been so lucky in finding Miss Walter and Miss Templeton, and then staying with Anker at the Ford's home. She wouldn't mind sleeping in a barn at all.

They all walked back to Mr. Harley's house, Anker leading the three dinosaurs on their rope leashes. They pulled and cried a bit, being tired from the long flight, but he gently coaxed them along. Betsy and Tacy helped by making snickering noises at the

girls and holding out their fingers to entice them forward (though they had to not get too close, or those pterodactyl beaks might bite them). Anker had already fed them with some meat he'd brought from home in his backpack.

At last they got to Mr. Harley's house, and he led them around back to the small barn, "from when I used to have a horse and buggy," he told them. It was a quiet and clean brick building with a wide double door (necessary for those wide pterodactyl wings), a stall for a horse that would work well for the dinosaurs, and plenty of hay on the ground for them to sleep on. Anker tended to the tired dinosaurs, made sure they got some water, and then they all followed Mr. Harley into his house. He said he could rustle up some eggs and toast for them, since they hadn't eaten in so long and were all hungry. He had a jar of jam too, and made tea. "My Clara always preferred tea to coffee. I still drank coffee, but Clara got me in the tea habit, too, especially at night. So I can offer you tea."

"Thank you, sir, it's very kind of you," said Anker.

They sat at the little table in his little house, and he donned a large white apron and got out a big skillet. He toasted bread in the oven and the eggs he cooked up in a swirl of butter smelled heavenly. Betsy's stomach growled loudly enough for everyone to hear, and they all laughed. Mr. Harley cooking for them reminded Betsy of her father making sandwiches for Sunday Night Lunch, and that made her a little sad. But soon they were eating eggs and discussing flying again.

"As a thank you for your hospitality and help, sir," said Anker, "I'd like to repay you by giving you a short flight on one of the dinosaurs before we leave in the morning. We'll have to keep it to about five minutes because we can't tire them out before our long trip, but you could at least have a taste and see what it's like."

Mr. Harley, who had a piece of toast with jam in one hand and a tea cup in the other, fell back against his chair with a shocked look on his face. "Really?"

"Would you like that?" asked Betsy.

He got to his feet and gave a big boyish Whoop! "Would I ever! Hallelujah! I get to fly tomorrow morning? I can hardly believe it!"

Betsy and Tacy laughed and got to their feet too. It was wonderful to think they'd seen this crabby, scowling old man peering out his window at them, telling them to go away, blossom into this joyfully giddy and laughing man, looking more boyish by the second, in his glee about his new adventure. It would be a fun morning.

And now it was time for sleep. They were all exhausted. You had to stay so alert when flying that it really did wear you out when you could finally get on the ground and let down your guard. Mr. Harley found several blankets and helped the kids bring them out. He bade them goodnight, and Betsy, Tacy and Anker all made nests for themselves in the piles of hay. The barn smelled good and it was warm shelter from the cool autumn night air. They only said a few words to each other before they all blissfully fell into slumber.

Chapter 9: A Stop, a Stranger, a Storm

They all slept well in the barn, tired out from the previous day. Mr. Harley started waking them up at 7:00 am, luring them into the house with the promise of oatmeal and hot chocolate. The idea of it sounded so warm and comforting, and the mention of cocoa reminded Betsy and Tacy of home and picnics. It just furthered their resolve to get going and face another day of flying, knowing that they might even arrive in Milwaukee by nightfall. The idea of another whole day of flying wasn't pleasant for them (Anker, of course, just loved the flying), but it was a means to an end, and now they really knew what to expect. It would be easier today.

The oatmeal was laced with cinnamon, raisins and maple syrup, and the hot chocolate was dark and wonderful. They scraped their bowls and drank every last sip, and offered to wash the dishes, but Mr. Harley said he had all day to wash dishes. He wanted to make sure he'd have time to fly before they left. "Of course, we'll make sure you get to fly," assured Anker.

Anker took care of feeding the pterodactyls (Mr. Harley donated some fish from his ice box), and then he was ready to walk them back to the open field. Mr. Harley, Betsy and Tacy each carried a harness while Anker led the three dinosaurs, who were wide awake and lively. Anker talked to them in a calming voice as he led them down the street. "Are you girls ready to fly again today? You liked that yesterday, didn't you? A nice long day of flying. Well, you'll get more of that today. You're the best pterodactyls, aren't you? So well behaved!"

Betsy and Tacy exchanged an "isn't-that-so-sweet" look. He obviously really cared about those dinosaurs. Even though he wanted to use them for a travel business, they

were his pets, and he sure took good care of them. They responded beautifully to his manner and the way he treated them. They obeyed, accepted his training, and were willing cooperators. It was a mutually beneficial relationship.

When they got to the field, Anker harnessed up Ditzzy and Mitzy. He would fly up on Ditzzy and let Mr. Harley have a ride on Mitzy, and Anker would lead him on a short flight, as he had for Betsy and Tacy's first flight. It was much safer than just sending someone up there alone for the first time. Betsy and Tacy helped with getting the harnesses set up. They'd learned from watching Anker and Todo do this several times. They still wanted Anker to check all the straps and make sure everything was tight, and he did so.

Mr. Harley was pacing, his face a mixture of giddy with excitement and afraid, too. He was pacing very fast, probably to quell some anxiety. At one point he paused and put a hand on Anker's shoulder. "Are you sure they can handle a full-grown man?" he asked. "I'm bigger than you kids."

Anker nodded reassuringly. "Todo and I have carried heavy backpacks on our backs, to see what weights the girls can handle. They have never had a problem or seemed to fly any differently. Once both Todo and I flew together on Ditzzy, squished into the harness together. It wasn't very comfortable, but she acted like it was nothing. I think these dinosaurs are much stronger than they look."

Mr. Harley resumed his pacing, muttering to himself. Soon the dinosaurs were ready, and Anker was helping Mr. Harley into the harness on Mitzy's back, and strapping him in tight. He explained all the instructions and hand signals, and what he could expect. And then Anker was in his harness on Ditzzy's back, giving the signal and Ditzzy was running and then taking off. Mitzy followed, and then they were both in the

air, Mr. Harley at first let out a surprised "Ahhh!" But once they'd gotten up higher, he let out a "whoop!" and they knew he was all right and enjoying himself. Betsy and Tacy shielded their hands over their eyes so they could see the flyers better, and followed them as they flew. It was so different to watch the flying happen from the ground, to see the big wings beating, and yet, how small the dinosaurs and passengers looked once they got high into the sky. They looked like little birds. It appeared so carefree, the flying, but Betsy and Tacy knew that when you were actually flying up there, nothing felt small about the experience. The sky felt as big as an endless ocean, the dinosaur seemed thick and heavy beneath them, and the ground and the houses and the trees below them were what looked small and insubstantial. It was funny what a difference perspective made.

Anker led Mr. Harley around in a large circle several times, so that the two were up in the air about five minutes, as Anker had promised. As they started to come in for a landing, the girls could see a huge grin and happy eyes on Mr. Harley's face. He almost seemed to have no wrinkles anymore because his face looked so enraptured. Once he landed, Betsy and Tacy helped him out of his harness and down from Mitzy. "That was magnificent!" he cried.

Anker beamed at him. Here was someone who could share his own passion for flying. Here was an appreciator of flying, someone who admired his business idea and would gladly endorse it. Betsy and Tacy were going along with it, but they didn't have a passion for flying-- rather, they saw it as a means to an end, to get them to Milwaukee quickly, and honestly, they were not entirely comfortable while flying. They white-knuckled it and gritted their teeth and got through it. Anker was of course happy to help them and happy to fly with them, but it was nothing like flying with someone who really

really got it, as much as he did. Something made flying special for him. Mr. Harley knew it too.

Betsy and Tacy took a seat on the ground while Anker and Mr. Harley had their excited-about-flying conversation. Both men were exclaiming and sharing anecdotes. Mr. Harley told about what it was like to ride in the hot air balloon, with the basket swinging in the wind and the hot air coming down from inside the balloon. It was a magical experience. Anker told about his first flight and what a thrill and yet how terrifying it was, because the dinosaurs were then untested and they weren't sure what to expect. It could've ended badly. It had taken them a while to train the pterodactyls, to get them to fly the way the boys needed them to. It was a learning experience.

And then, when they'd talked themselves out, it was time to go. The harness was on Fritzzy too, and this time it was Anker and Mr. Harley getting them into the harnesses and strapping them on tight. Betsy and Tacy and Anker thanked Mr. Harley thoroughly and with heartfelt words of gratitude. He had made their night of rest not just bearable but comfortable. That was a great gift.

Mr. Harley was a transformed man, especially after flying. He looked so much happier and softer, like 20 years had fallen away in an instant. He took the time to thank them, too. "You kids have changed my life. I'm so glad you found me last night, and again I apologize for being such a curmudgeon at the door. I never thought I would get the chance to fly like that. The Wright Brothers would be amazed! I hope you have a very safe trip and get the help you need in Milwaukee."

He shook each of their hands, and Anker told him that he might be able to stop in Portage on the way back to La Crosse after he got the girls to Milwaukee. "If I can stay with you again, then maybe you can have another flight," said Anker.

Mr. Harley clutched his hand. "I would love that, my boy! You all are welcome here anytime."

And then it was Anker giving the countdown and Betsy and Tacy preparing themselves mentally and physically for flight. Both girls held on tight, bracing themselves, and then the dinosaurs were running and lifting themselves into the air with their strong beating wings. Betsy's stomach still clenched as they rose up, up, up. Even with the butterflies, she wasn't as nervous or as tight as yesterday. It was all familiar now, the view from the sky, the wind in her face, the strength of the dinosaur beneath her. She looked up at Anker, his body all strength and certainty as he flew ahead. She looked over at Tacy, who was still holding on for dear life, but now when Betsy looked over at her, Tacy looked over and smiled. That was a very good sign indeed. And just to see how brave she could be, Betsy let go with her left hand and waved fiercely at Tacy as she held on even tighter with her right hand. It wasn't so scary at all. And Tacy took her own bold move by nodding her head in a large up and down movement. She wouldn't have dared doing that yesterday. Flying wasn't so bad after all.

The three of them settled in for another long day of flying. Still warmed by the oatmeal and hot cocoa, they would be flying for several hours before they would land and take a break. Strained by yesterday's long day in the air, Betsy felt her arms grow tired more quickly, and her derriere was a little sore from the hard wooden seat of the harness. Without Tacy right next to her to entertain (or be entertaining with), she quickly grew bored. This is going to be a long day, she thought. She started to explore her imagination for ways to entertain herself during this long time of imposed silence.

She let her mind wander. She had been so consumed with survival and logistics over the last few days that she hadn't really had much in the way of imagination time.

Usually in her daily life, she'd have at least a little time for daydreaming, thinking and writing. She didn't realize until now how important that actually was to her, the freedom of having time to think, to let her mind play so that she could make up stories and explore ideas. After all these survival days, she felt a little rusty. But that was okay, she knew it would come back to her. She had faith in that.

She started first by just singing some of her favorite songs, the songs Julia played and her family sang around the piano. She sang a few church hymns too. That was one of the best things about going to church, getting to sing along with a big crowd of people. It was uplifting. She wasn't always crazy about the praying and the preaching part of church. When she felt like she had sung enough, she started retelling herself some of her favorite fairy tales, like Cinderella and Sleeping Beauty. But she decided to change some of the details, like letting Cinderella stay at the ball and be able to reveal herself to her wicked stepmother and stepsisters, to watch their jealousy as she danced with the prince, to watch them try to change their ways and be falling over themselves to be nice to her. She tried playing with Sleeping Beauty to make the prince be the one who was under a sleeping spell and the fair princess was the one who woke him with a kiss. Why not? It was fun to mix things around.

Betsy remembered the Flossie's Head story that she had made up last year, when she was sick at home. That story had just flowed out of her, and she loved how that felt. She'd just made it up as she went along, with little ideas popping into her mind, and it was such fun. That had been a good story, and Tib and Tacy had thought so too, so much that they urged her to send it into the women's magazine that published stories. But after Tib copied out the story in her small neat handwriting and they'd put it in an envelope and mailed it, they never heard back from the magazine. This after they'd all

planned and schemed how they would spend the money the story would earn. It was disappointing to hear nothing back, but it had also been a proud moment for Betsy as a writer. She had written something and mailed it into a magazine for the first time! Like a real grown-up writer did. She was sure it would be the first of many times she mailed out her writing. And maybe one day, the editor would write back and say, "We love your writing and want to publish it in our magazine. We are going to pay you \$200 for your story." And then Betsy would be a published author! She could hardly wait for that day to come.

Betsy looked down at the landscape going by. It had been neat to see the portage land between the Fox and the Wisconsin Rivers back in Portage from overhead. Now they were back to the rolling hills of Wisconsin, long forests of trees off to the side, farms and rivers and lakes and ponds. Sometimes there were cows and horses out in a field, and once she spied some chickens in a farm yard that looked as big as ants. The sky looked gray with a wall of clouds ahead of them. It was getting colder as they flew, too. Betsy was grateful for the thick hat and scarf she wore.

When they stopped for lunch, they landed in a grassy area beside a stream. They were able to fill up their water canteens there, and make sure the dinosaurs had a drink too. They had a lunch of dried meat, cheese and bread, their traveling food. But Anker was worried about the weather.

"We're flying right into those dark clouds," he said, pointing ahead. "I'm afraid we might run into a storm of some kind. Maybe even snow, if it gets much colder."

Tacy shivered and hugged her arms close around her. "I wish we were there already. I don't want to fly in snow."

"I don't think we should," said Anker. "I don't think it would be good for the dinosaurs. It might make the flying more dangerous. We'd have to stop and take a break."

Betsy felt dread in the pit of her stomach. She didn't want to have to land and postpone their flying. She wanted to be in Milwaukee now, or as soon as possible. This storm didn't sound like fun. "Could we fly around it?"

"It looks too big. That wall of clouds covers the whole horizon. But let's get back in the air and see how far we can get. You never know," said Anker.

When they'd stopped for lunch, they were at the halfway point for today's flying. The plan was to be in Milwaukee by nightfall. But they still had about four hours to go. They were back in the air with the dinosaurs pushing hard onward, but the wind was getting stronger. After an hour, the snow started. Anker turned to look at Betsy with a frown, and pointed down to the ground at a barn down below. It was old and gray and had patches of it missing. It looked like it could fall over, and there was a broken-down fence along one side of the road nearby. As the flakes grew fat and hit them coldly in the face, they landed and dismounted from their pterodactyls. Anker led them all to the barn. He asked Betsy to hold onto Ditzzy's leash while he went in to explore the barn.

He came out in a few minutes. "It's pretty bare bones, just some walls and old rusted equipment and hay, but it will keep us out of the weather. It will have to do."

"I wonder how long it will snow?" asked Tacy.

"It might be a while," said Anker, looking grimly at the clouds. "But we'll manage."

They entered the barn and put the dinosaurs in one corner with some straw, and then the three of them took another empty corner, away from the drafty holes in the walls. It was still cold, but they didn't have snow and wind hitting them in the face. They

sat down and waited. They were all impatient to get to their destination and have this adventure be over, and so they sat silently, nothing to say, just waiting. And waiting.

Just sitting there was making them colder by the minute. Tacy's teeth started chattering. Betsy went to sit right next to her friend and put her arm around her, trying to get them both a bit warmer. Anker looked blue in the face, and Tacy went and patted the ground right next to her. "It's warmer if we sit close. We need to stay warm enough."

Anker looked reluctant, but he slowly scooted over to sit right next to Tacy, and they were all sitting side by side, letting their bodies keep each other warm. Well, they weren't warm by any stretch of the imagination, but they were warmer than they'd been sitting alone.

"I feel like I've known you two forever," said Anker after a long silence. "But it's only been about three days."

"Yeah," said Betsy. "I guess we've been through a lot in a short amount of time."

"That's for sure," said Tacy. "Who would've ever thought I'd be flying through the air on the back of a dinosaur? Scaredy-cat me?"

"You may be scared but you're very brave, Tacy," said Betsy.

They sat in silence that seemed to go on and on. All they could think about was the cold and the storm, and when it would stop. But it didn't.

"Tell us a story, Betsy!" requested Tacy.

Betsy searched her mind, but her imagination seemed to be turned off. "I can't think of anything," she said sadly.

"You could tell Anker about some of the fun things we've done. Or Sunday Night Lunch. He'd like that," suggested Tacy.

"Okay, I can do that," said Betsy. And she started to spin a story about Sunday Night Lunch at the Ray house (though she tried not to think about her missing family and how she didn't know if they'd ever have a Sunday night lunch again). She talked about her family, her friendly and generous and funny father, her pretty and sweet mother, talented Julie and cute little Margaret. She told how they had started doing Sunday Night Lunches to give Mrs. Ray a night off from cooking dinner, so Mr. Ray would make sandwiches from whatever leftovers he could find in the icebox, but there were always at the very least onion sandwiches, his specialty. She told about how there was an open invitation to friends, family and neighbors to drop by and spend some time. Sometimes there was a big crowd, and other times just one or two others. She told how it was fun to sit and watch her father make the sandwiches. And that there was usually singing around the piano, with Julia or Mrs. Ray playing. And a fire in the grate.

Tacy chimed in on details. She had been to Sunday Night Lunch so many times. And Anker seemed to like to hear about it. He got a faraway look in his eyes imagining the feast and the fun. When Betsy talked about the fire in the grate, he jumped up with excitement. "I know, we could start a fire!" he declared.

There as some old dry wood in the barn, and old boards and a broken-down stall. But how would they start a fire, with just those?

Betsy asked the question, and Anker replied that he'd read about starting a fire by rubbing wood together. "It might not work," he said, "but it might make us warm to try."

Betsy and Tacy shrugged and got up. It was worth a try. They started looking for smaller twigs and pieces of wood to use as kindling. "This old dried up straw might catch fire quickly," said Anker.

They gathered wood and twigs and straw, and then Anker set about trying to put into practice what he'd read. He pulled out a piece of rope from his backpack, thinner than the heavy rope he used for leashing the dinosaurs. He used the rope to make a bow by attaching it to a stick. He used his knife to dig a drilling hole into one of the boards, and started to use the bow to saw one of the sticks that was drilling down into the board. He started sawing the bow very fast. He sawed and sawed, faster and faster, and he was breathing hard. After a while, he'd stop and examine the wood and the straw for any signs of smoking, but there was nothing.

"How's it going?" asked Betsy. She was fascinated by his attempts. She'd read adventure stories where people created fire this way, but she'd never seen anyone attempt it.

"Nothing yet," said Anker, still breathing hard. "But it does warm you up just to try."

So Betsy and Tacy each took a turn. It was really hard work to get that bow sawing fast, and they weren't nearly as fast as Anker. Sometimes one of the three would lie down on the ground and blow gently on the kindling straw, but they didn't ever succeed in making a fire. That was rather disappointing, but at least they were warm now. They still sat right next to each other to rest, wanting to conserve their heat. Betsy told Anker about their Betsy-Tacy picnics, and adventures on the Big Hill. He laughed and smiled, imagining their antics, and they were having fun telling him.

They doled out a few bits each of their remaining food. The three of them shared one of their three remaining apples, by each taking a bite and then passing it to the next person. They had planned out their food according to being in Milwaukee later today, but now they didn't know. There was snow on the ground. It was still snowing outside.

They took sips of their remaining canteen of water. "At least we can melt the snow and get more water easily," said Anker.

"How would we melt the snow, if we can't make a fire?" asked Tacy, looking worried about their predicament.

"I suppose we really don't have to melt it, do we?" said Betsy. "We can just eat it and it will be the same as drinking water." She and Tacy had eaten snow many many times, of course, as children growing up in Minnesota. It was such a common thing to do. But they'd never eaten snow out of necessity, because they were thirsty and no other water was available. It was good to know they had a back-up plan.

As they continued to huddle for warmth, Betsy and Tacy started asking Anker about his life. What it had been like when his mom and dad were alive. What had he done for fun as a little boy? How had it been when he and Todo had come up with the idea to use pterodactyls for flying? What was his first flight like? Anker seemed pleased to hear that the girls were interested in his life. As he talked, his eyes became bright. He looked sad when he talked about his mom and dad, though at some times he laughed at the way they had been all together. His eyes really lit up when he talked about flying for the first time, and his plans for the travel business with Todo.

"Will Todo be bored to have Mitzy, Ditzzy and Fritzzy gone?" asked Tacy.

"It's got to be strange for him, since we've been caring for the dinosaurs for over a year now. It's become a daily habit, just something we have to do. They depend on us. I doubt he's bored, though. He's always thinking of new ideas. I'll probably come home and find he's written up new plans and schemes for us. I hope he enjoys the break, though. I'll probably be exhausted by the time I get home and will need a little break," said Anker.

Betsy got up and walked over to the open doorway. She was stretching out her legs after sitting so long, and a little restless. She peered outside, then stepped out into the snow. "Hey, guess what? It stopped snowing!" she exclaimed.

The others too jumped to their feet and raced outside to see. The ground was covered in about two inches of fluffy white snow, but the wall of clouds was now pale, and no more snow was falling. "Yay!" shouted Tacy.

"It's not too late to fly, is it?" asked Betsy, turning to Anker.

He looked at his watch. It was 5:00, and they still had four hours to fly. "We might not get there until 9:00 at night, but I'd rather fly and get there late, rather than sit around here until tomorrow. It's just dark and cold to fly at night, that's all. What do you guys think?"

"Fly," said Tacy.

"Fly," agreed Betsy. "I don't want to waste any more time."

They set about getting ready to get back in the saddle, ready to fly, preparing the dinosaurs, which didn't take any time at all now that they all three knew how to do it and could make short work of it. Betsy and Tacy were becoming efficient dinosaur handlers, and they liked how strong and competent it made them feel. Wouldn't their families be surprised at this new side of them?

"Milwaukee, Betsy. We'll be in Milwaukee tonight!" said Tacy excitedly. "We've been wanting to go to Milwaukee ever since we were five!"

Betsy laughed, and started to sing the Milwaukee song, and Tacy chimed in. "There's a place called Milwaukee, Milwaukee. Milwaukee, Milwauk, Milwaukee..." They sang the full song. Anker laughed, and they could tell he was excited to get there too.

They led Mitzy, Fritzzy and Ditzzy outside. The dinosaurs seemed especially frisky walking through the snow. They wouldn't have to worry about them being too tired to fly. They had plenty of energy.

They all got themselves strapped in, pulling every strap tight and getting as comfortable in the seats as they could. And then, following Anker's lead, they were all rising up, up, up into the air.

The sun had already started its descent, though darkness wouldn't come for over an hour. It was still colder now, and they steeled themselves against the frigid air blowing right at them. They could endure this for a few hours, they knew.

Betsy occupied her mind with thinking about Milwaukee, and everything they knew about it, which really wasn't much. Tib talked about it sometimes, that it was a bigger city and very German. Most of Tib's family was there, and they spoke German a lot of the time.

Gradually, the sun went down and they were treated to a pretty sunset, cloudy though it was. Pink and gold and lavender smeared across the sky. Betsy knew Tacy was appreciating it too. They had enjoyed so many sunsets together (and a few sunrises), and they both were often content to sit and soak in the beauty and have silent appreciation and gratitude for that moment. Even though they did like to talk, they didn't always need to talk. And now, they couldn't talk, but Betsy saw Tacy's head turned toward the sunset, and they both had that same moment of appreciation as they flew through the sky. It was a different perspective, to enjoy the sunset from the sky.

Now shades of darkness settled upon them, first a royal blue, then a bluish, deep purple, and now the black of night dark. Some of the houses they flew above showed little lights in their windows, which was a friendly sight. The moon rose, a pretty

crescent moon hanging out in the sky, so gloriously full of light against the background of the velvet black night sky. They felt closer to the moon up here. It kept them company as they flew.

They flew and flew and flew. They were cold and tired and hungry. Betsy wasn't sure how Anker knew where they were or how to keep them going in the right direction, but he was always fiddling with maps and compasses and gadgets and pens when they were on the ground, planning the flight path and measuring. She was glad he seemed so competent and full of knowledge about this stuff, because she certainly didn't understand it. She just trusted him.

Just when it was starting to feel like they'd been flying forever and that it would never end, Anker signaled back to them that it was time to land. Betsy could see that a city that was spread out wide before them. It was a bigger city than they'd seen anywhere along the way so far. It was so big, she wondered how they would ever find Tib. It would be like searching for a needle in a haystack. But she knew they were willing to search any haystack until they'd find that needle. They would have to.

Chapter 10: Milwaukee, Milwauk, Milwaukee

Flying on their pterodactyls, Betsy and Tacy followed Anker as he led them down once again to an open field. This time it wasn't a field on the outskirts of a town, but a grassy area smack dab in the middle to town. As they landed, Betsy could tell that it was a large park. It had not snowed here, so they landed on dried grass. The dinosaurs squawked, glad to be done with flying. They had been real troupers too, to fly for so long in the cold and dark.

The routine for landing was getting faster too. They were able to unstrap themselves from the harness, hop down to the ground, then remove the harnesses from the dinosaurs while tying rope leashes around them. Soon they were all done. They each carried their own harness and lead their own dinosaur, but now what? They were on the ground in a park in Milwaukee with three pterodactyls.

They looked around the park. There wasn't much there. There were dead gardens and statues and a pavilion and benches. There were houses along the streets around the park, and some shops. No answers came to mind.

They stood there tossing out ideas. "We could curl up in the pavilion and try to sleep."

"We could knock on doors and see about someone letting us sleep in their shed or garage."

"We could walk around and see if we find anything that might be helpful."

They all agreed on the third option. The idea of knocking on doors so late didn't feel great. They didn't know anything about Milwaukee, so they didn't know what they would find here. They just knew it was bigger than any of the other locations they'd been

in so far. Hopefully there were more options here too, but they would have to find those options on their own.

They started to walk (which at least would help them warm up a little). The streets were empty and quiet, with street lamps shining softly, so at least it wasn't completely dark. In many houses the lights were out. Their footsteps sounded loud as they walked the paved streets, with dinosaurs softly squealing and squawking along with them.

At least this was interesting stimuli for their eyes and their bodies, after sitting in harnesses flying through the air in the dark for so long. They were getting a taste of Milwaukee, a quiet and subdued taste, but they were really here at last. And Tib was here somewhere, and help for them was here somewhere. Even though they didn't know what to do with themselves tonight, they were happy to be onto the next stage of their journey.

They passed shops and houses, some big homes and some tiny ones. They passed a school and a church, and they tried the doors to see if they were open so they could just have some place to spend the night, but both places were closed. They kept walking.

They heard a noise coming toward them after a long while. It was the clop-clop of horse hooves. Tacy looked at Betsy and they both glanced at Anker. At last they saw, far down the next block, a lone figure coming toward them on horseback. They didn't know what else to do, so they kept walking forward, toward the horse rider. At last they could tell it was a police officer, probably doing a night patrol of the streets. As he got closer, he called out to them. "Hello!" called his deep voice. "What have we here?"

The three of them stopped, and held the dinosaurs in place. "Hello, officer," Anker called back.

As he neared them, they could see a tall figure with a big dark bushy moustache. He wore a uniform and a tall hat. He sat up straight on his horse, which was black and shiny as the night.

"I'm Officer Bennett. Who might you three be?" he asked when he pulled up in front of them and stopped his horse.

They each called out their names. "I'm Anker Turtlemap from La Crosse, Wisconsin."

"I'm Betsy Ray, from Deep Valley, Minnesota."

"I'm Tacy Kelly from Deep Valley."

"You children have come a long way to be in Milwaukee tonight. And accompanied by three dinosaurs, I see. I'm guessing there is a story involved. But first I want to know where you are headed tonight."

Betsy spoke up. "Officer Bennett, we just arrived in town a few moments ago. And yes, there is a long story about why we are here and how we came to be here. But for tonight, we don't know where to go. We're looking for shelter, but we don't know Milwaukee at all."

The officer looked at them and appeared to be biting his lip under his prodigious moustache. After thinking another minute, he said, "Why don't you follow me back to the police department. We can at least get you out of the cold and provide you with a warm bed for the night. And I'd like to hear your story. But let's get out of the cold first. You three look like you're about to turn blue."

He led the way, slowing his pace down to a crawl so they could keep up. It was about a mile away through the dark streets. None of them talked, and there were just a few squawky noises from the dinosaurs as they pulled them along. At last they came to a

large square two-story building made of pale bricks, with Milwaukee Police Department #1 written on a sign by the front door. To Betsy, Tacy and Anker, it was a welcome sight, all lit up and warm-looking.

First Officer Bennett took them out back to the horse barn. This was plenty big, since the police department had many horses for police officers to use. And there was an unused stall where Fritzzy, Ditzzy and Mitzy could stay for the night. The dinosaurs seemed ready to collapse into the hay and rest. Anker and Betsy and Tacy all helped to get them settled and made sweet talk to the dinosaurs who had helped them so much on this journey. The girls were already settling in by the time they turned to leave. Officer Bennett had put his black horse in one of the stalls.

Now they walked back to the Police Department building. Officer Bennett took them in the back door, and led them upstairs. They went through a doorway into a large room with several desk and chairs in it. Another officer was sitting at one of the desks. He was busily recording something in a notebook, writing fast. He looked up and waved, saying "Hi James," and Officer Bennett nodded to return the greeting. At first the young officer hadn't seen the three of them, but then his eyes showed recognition. He put down his pen and started to walk over. "Who have you got here?" he asked.

"Let me see if I remember this correctly," said James Bennett, who turned to the three youth. He pointed to each one in turn. "Anker... Betsy... Tacy. Right?"

They smiled and nodded.

"But I don't know much about them yet, except that they've traveled far and arrived in Milwaukee with three pterodactyls. It's cold out there and they need a place to stay for the night, so I just brought them in. I didn't get a chance to hear their story yet,"

he explained. "Kids, this is Officer Ignatius Mallory, who is taking care of the night desk tonight. We take turns having desk shifts or patrol shifts."

Officer Mallory waved, and then suggested, "Why don't we get them off their feet, sir, and brew a cup of tea? That will warm them up."

The officers took them over to a waiting room area with two couches, and the younger officer went off and soon came back with a tray of cups filled with hot tea. The kids were so grateful. They hadn't let themselves realize how cold they'd been all day, and now with the warmth of the building and the warmth of the tea, they could relax.

As they sat, they began to tell the story. The story was getting long. There was no two ways about it, starting with Betsy and Tacy back in Deep Valley with the T. rex, their discovery about the town, and their decision to leave Deep Valley to go to Milwaukee. They were able to summarize a bit, no need to tell the officers about everyone they met on their journey, but then they needed to explain about meeting Anker and how their plans developed from there.

"You really flew here on the backs of pterodactyls, all the way from La Crosse?" asked Officer Mallory, his face amazed and excited by the prospect.

"We did," nodded Anker, getting to share his own excitement. "It was the first really long flight I've had the dinosaurs go on. It was a risk, but I was confident they could do it. If we hadn't run into some bad weather along the way, we would have been here hours ago."

"Well, I'll be," said Officer Bennett, impressed. "If that doesn't beat everything. I suppose if people can ride on other dinosaurs, why not flying dinosaurs? Bravo to you, boy, for thinking of it." Officer Bennett tipped his hat at Anker.

He turned to Betsy and Tacy. "And now you're looking for your friend and her father, is that right?"

"Yes sir," said Tacy.

"Her father works in Dino Control," said Betsy. "That's why they moved to Milwaukee from Deep Valley, because he's an expert at controlling dinosaurs and they've had some extra wild ones here causing trouble. We were very sorry to have Tib move away, but that's not really why we're here. We're very worried about our town of Deep Valley, and discovering that everyone had disappeared. The T. rex on the loose was definitely a wild, troublesome dinosaur, and we thought Mr. Muller would be able to help us out. And maybe he can help us find out what happened to our families and our neighbors. It was all deserted when we left."

Tacy's eyes were big and troubled. "Actually, we don't know if Mr. Muller can help us. It's such a strange situation. But it was the only thing we could think of, to find him and see if he could help us solve the mystery, maybe make everything better again."

Officer Bennett saw how sad the girls looked. He reached out and patted Tacy's hand, nodding sympathetically. "We'll do what we can to help you with this, too. For sure we'll find Mr. Muller, but I'm sure we can solve this and help out. There's got to be something, some explanation, and some solution."

"Thank you," said Betsy.

"But nothing can really be done at 10:00 at night, very easily," said Officer Mallory, looking at his watch. "You children seem to need some rest, not to mention recovery from your long and cold journey. "We'll have you sleep here tonight, then first thing in the morning, we'll have you at Mr. Muller's home. It's across town, but we can get you there."

"That sounds like a good plan," agreed Officer Bennett.

There were two couches in the waiting room, so two of the kids could sleep there. Then the officers presented the other bedding option. "There's a cot in each of the jail cells. One of you could sleep there. We'd leave the door open, of course. If you don't find that too strange," said Officer Bennett.

Betsy and Tacy looked at each other and wrinkled up their noses, which made both the officers snort with laughter. "So you girls don't like that idea, do you? Sleeping in a jail cell isn't your cup of tea?" said Officer Mallory. "Ah, but the lad..."

They all turned to look at Anker, and saw him sitting with a gleeful look on his face, his eyes big with wonder. "Sleep in a jail cell? Oh boy, and how! Wait till I tell Todo. He'll be so jealous!"

They all laughed then, at the differences in reaction between them. Tacy and Betsy agreed they'd be perfectly content and happy sleeping on the couches, and Anker would have his own night of adventure (well, adventure in his imagination at least, pretending to be jailed) sleeping in the jail cell. Betsy and Tacy did accompany Anker and the officers down the hall to one of the single cells. It was just what you'd expect of a jail cell, with plain cement walls on three sides with only a tiny barred window near the ceiling. And then the front of the cell was all bars, with a barred metal door with a big lock on it. Inside was a thin cot. It gave Betsy the chills to look at it, and she couldn't imagine wanting to spend a night in there. Even in the name of research as a writer. It looked so cold and bare. No thank you. She'd already had enough hard situations to get through on this journey already.

The officers found blankets and pillows for the kids, and Anker happily entered the jail cell and plopped down on his cot. The girls called goodnight to him and turned

and went back to the waiting room. Soon they were snuggled down on their blankets, feeling warm and cozy for a change, and ready to fall asleep. It was good to have a safe and warm place like this. What could be safer than the police department? Well, unless a T. rex came around. Then all bets were off.

Both girls fell fast asleep, despite the fact that the police office was open all night and the lights stayed on. Officer Bennett said he was going home for the night but would be back in the morning to help them in their search for Tib and her father. He said it was his day off, but he was so interested in seeing what would come of their adventure that he wanted to be a part of making it happen. Officer Mallory was on duty all night at the police office, as well as a few other officers. The girls felt like they were in good hands.

The girls awoke the next morning at about 8:00 am, hearing some commotion near the door as a new shift of officers came in. Betsy and Tacy sat up blinking, momentarily confused as to where they were, and the new officers seemed confused to see two girls sleeping on the couches underneath a mound of blankets. Officer Mallory was just getting ready to end his shift, and he pulled the new officers over, explaining to them the situation in hushed tones. He told them Officer Bennett would be coming over this morning to help with the kids and their needs. These new officers just needed to make the kids comfortable, and see about getting them some food in the meantime.

One of the officers went out and procured some bread and butter and slices of ham for the kids. Another officer shared some donuts from a bakery down the street. They ate it gratefully. Now Anker was up and sitting with them in the couch waiting room area. While eating their breakfast, Betsy asked if sleeping in the jail cell was as interesting as he thought it would be.

"It was great!" he said with enthusiasm. "It got me into pretending that I'd been convicted wrongfully for a crime I didn't commit, locked up for the night, awaiting my lawyer to come and plead my case. And then I started to think about how I would escape, if I ended up stuck in jail. I had fun with all the plotting and scheming until I fell asleep."

"I'm glad you can entertain yourself," said Betsy. She had a lot of experience with a rich fantasy life and keeping herself (and her friends) entertained with it. It's what fueled a lot of her writing too; she could imagine things and then make up characters and have them live it out.

"I'm glad I haven't forgotten how," said Anker. "Sometimes now I get so serious, trying to figure out how to become independent, how to run a business, taking care of all the things I need to take care of. Maybe that's what grownups do, become so busy in their lives and all the work they have to do that they don't have time for fun or play. I'm still just a kid, but I've been acting more like a grown up in some ways."

Betsy felt sorry for Anker. She could only guess what it must be like, to have lost both your parents at such a young age and then be dependent on the good graces of strangers just to help you survive. And the pressure he must feel to become independent and take care of himself, not wanting to be too indebted to others. You would have to start thinking like a grownup. It just made her realize how lucky she was. And, she swallowed a lump in her throat at the thought: she hoped she was still that lucky. The questions about her family resurfaced.

The door opened just as the kids were cleaning themselves up after their breakfast, wiping away crumbs and wiping their faces. Betsy and Tacy had gone off to the bathroom to use water from the sink to scrub themselves their faces and necks with

invigorating cold water. As they were coming back to the lounge, they heard Officer Bennett greeting Anker, and then he saw them and included Betsy and Tacy in the greeting.

"Did you sleep well? I'm sure it can't have been too comfortable, sleeping on the couches or sleeping on that thin cot in the jail cell," he asked, friendly and looking well-rested after his own night of sleep.

"It was way better than sleeping in a barn on piles of hay, or on the ground outside, which is what we've had to do on this journey," said Tacy. "We're really grateful for a warm and dry place to get some rest."

It was time for Officer Mallory to go home after his shift. He yawned as he packed his bag. "Best of luck, kids. I hope you find your friend and can get some help for your home town. Keep in touch and let us know how you fare back in Deep Valley. It is such a mystery!"

"We will," said Betsy.

The night-shift officers left, and now Officer Bennett took his place at the police desk. There was one donut left on a plate on the desk, and his eyes lit up and he winked as he reached over and picked it up. "I think I'll need some nourishment for the day ahead. We have a big task ahead of us. First find your Milwaukee friend, and then see what we can do to help you solve the mystery back home."

Betsy and Tacy nodded eagerly. They were filled with a mixture of excitement and nervousness for the day ahead. They would get to see Tib! And they would hopefully get some much-needed help to bring back to Deep Valley.

But first there was the matter of finding Tib. Betsy and Tacy pulled up chairs to his desk to talk about ways to do this. They knew Tib's family had a house somewhere, and

that they lived near grandparents and aunts and uncles. “Is there a German part of town?” asked Betsy.

The officer stroked his chin. “Indeed, there is; however, it is quite a large area. Her last name is Muller, you say? Do you know her father’s name?”

They were sure that they knew it, that they must know it, but Tib called her father Papa and they called him Mr. Muller. On the spot, that’s all they could come up with.

“There are a lot of Mullers in this German town,” said the officer. “Do you know what street they live on, perhaps?”

Betsy and Tacy looked at each other, brows furrowed. They had written Tib lots of letters since she had moved, and even addressed the envelopes themselves. Why couldn’t they remember now, when they needed so badly to know it?

“Was it Maple Street?” muttered Tacy, “or River Street? No, that’s not right. I can’t remember.”

“Me either,” said Betsy. They looked at the officer with worried eyes.

“That makes it more challenging,” he said, “but not impossible. Let’s go down to the post office and look at addresses.”

“I’m going to stay here and check in on the girls,” said Anker. When Officer Benedict looked at him with scrunched up eyebrows, he explained, “the pterodactyls. I have to see how they’re doing, and figure out some way to feed them.”

“Oh yes,” said the officer. “I’m sure we can find someone here to help you with that.”

“Thanks,” said Anker. “I guess that’s something Todo and I will have to figure out if we’re going to have a pterodactyl travel service, how we feed them wherever we go.”

Betsy and Tacy waved goodbye to him as they followed Officer Benedict out the door. The morning was sunny but cool, and it was nice to get to walk around and not have to think about flying right away. It had been dark when they got to the city last night, and now they could see Milwaukee by day. Milwaukee! Betsy still could hardly believe they were here.

They walked to the street where Officer Benedict had a police horse and buggy waiting. Already Betsy could tell Milwaukee was a much bigger city than Deep Valley. Downtown Deep Valley had its shops and three-story buildings, but there was a feeling of “More” here: more buildings, more people, more traffic, more busyness. A big city! She reached out and grabbed Tacy’s hand and gave it a squeeze. Of course, Milwaukee was probably Lilliput compared to New York City or London, but still, it was the biggest city they had been to. Momma and Papa had been to Minneapolis and they’d talked about that. Betsy wanted to go there sometime, and now she would be able to compare Milwaukee and Minneapolis.

The officer patted the big chestnut-colored horse in front of the buggy, who tossed its head and snorted in greeting. “What its name?” asked Tacy.

“This here is Cocoa. She’s a good girl, right Cocoa?” His voice softened, curling at the edges in that way people talk to babies and animals. “It’s okay, you can pet her.”

Betsy and Tacy were happy to do so. Cocoa was wearing a navy blue covering on her back with the Milwaukee Police Department words and symbol on it. She was leaner and younger than Old Mag, but Betsy could tell she was very strong, just standing there.

“Okay, let’s get you girls settled in and we’ll go see about finding your friend.”

Soon they were in the back of the buggy as Officer Benedict sat in front of them and Cocoa trotted down the street. “I just can’t stop thinking of when we were five,”

Betsy whispered to Tacy. “When we were in that old buggy in the yard, imagining we were going to Milwaukee!”

“And now we’re 12 and in a buggy in Milwaukee,” Tacy whispered back. “We never could have guessed!”

They both sat up, looking out the windows of the buggy at all the Milwaukee life around them. It was early, but there was plenty of other buggy traffic on the street, not to mention a few dinosaurs carrying passengers. Officer Mallory waved to another police officer who was directing traffic on foot at a busy intersection.

It was fun to see the busy people on the sidewalks, going in and out of shops, women holding hands with younger children, and stores with signs in what must be German. Tib had written about Milwaukee being a real German town, and that seemed especially foreign and exciting to the girls. “Do people speak German here, Officer Benedict?” Betsy called out.

“Oh, many people do. This is a city of immigrants; many are German though some come from other European cities. Some folks are newer here and don’t speak any English. That can be challenging. I’ve learned a little German, but I really don’t speak it. We manage to get by.”

What must it be like to be able to speak a foreign language, Betsy wondered. Maybe Tib could speak German now.

After a mile’s drive through the city, Cocoa pulled them up in front of a tall brown building with a green awning. The sign told them they’d arrived at the post office, and the girls hopped out of the buggy and walked quickly behind the officer in the front doors.

They spent about an hour inside, waiting while Officer Mallory chatted with an older woman with bluish gray hair and a thick German accent. Frau Schmidt was helping them, pulling down massive long flat books from a shelf, laying them open on the counter and scanning her pointer finger down the page as she looked through the pince-nez glasses perched right on the tip of her nose. “Muller, Muller, Muller,” she muttered, “Frederick Muller, ja?” she asked, looking at Betsy and Tacy with her sharp blue eyes. They nodded—they thought that was right.

In the end, Frau Schmidt came up with a list of a dozen addresses for them to check out. She would read the addresses out of the book, slowly in her thick accent, and Officer Benedict wrote down the addresses in the police notebook he’d pulled out of his pocket. “Thank you for your kind help, Frau Schmidt,” he said, tipping his police hat to her.

She smiled and nodded back when Betsy and Tacy added their happy “Thank you, Frau Schmidt” to his, and they followed him out the door. They had a list! They had addresses to check, and one of them was probably Tib’s! Everything today was bringing them one step closer to their friend.

Their afternoon was spent seeing many parts of Milwaukee as Officer Benedict and Cocoa drove them to each of the addresses on the list, checking off each one as they went. Of course, they’d all hoped Tib’s would be the first or second one they visited, but this was giving them a chance to see more of Milwaukee. They went to a few small houses, a few medium ones, an apartment, and one mansion, and at each one Betsy and Tacy joined the officer in going to the front door, knocking and talking to the residents, seeing if it was Tib’s house.

By the time they got to the tenth house on the list, Betsy and Tacy were getting a little discouraged. They only had three more chances. What if Tib wasn't at any of them on the list? Then what? "Let's not worry about that yet," said Tacy when Betsy mentioned it to her. "We will deal with that when we get to that point. And it might work out just fine."

Officer Benedict pulled up in front of a brownstone duplex, and checked the address against his list, then set it down on the seat next to him as he disembarked from the buggy. He wound Cocoa's reins around the knob on the buggy and paused as the girls jumped out of the buggy. Betsy had been really excited at the first houses they'd stopped at, and now as they were getting tired and hungry, the cloud of discouragement hung heavy over her. She just wasn't that hopeful anymore.

There was a huge brass knocker on the front door and Officer Benedict knocked firmly several times with it. Betsy sighed heavily, waiting for another surprised face to tell them no, not here.

They heard quick footsteps, and then the door opened to the face of an older woman with heavy features and scrutinizing eyes. "Ach, lieber Gott!" Her hands flew up and she stepped back.

"Good morning, ma'am..." the officer tried to start his usual speech.

"Matilda!" both Betsy and Tacy shouted her name. They could hardly believe it. It was disorienting to see the Muller family's maid here, in this different house, so far away. After all this time, they had reached Tib's home in Milwaukee!

Chapter 11: Just Like Tib (Again)

Matilda had never been an affectionate adult in their lives, but the girls were so happy to see her that they ran forward and wrapped their arms around her. “Betsy und Tacy! Vas ist?”

They tried to explain to her why they were there, but they found it all too complicated, especially with the language barriers. They explained that they really needed to talk to Tib and Mr. Muller, and Matilda invited them in to wait in the front parlor. The family members would be arriving soon to sit down to supper. Of course they would be welcome to join the family. (Ah, Matilda’s cooking! That would be a familiar and comforting treat.)

Betsy and Tacy held hands as they sat in the front parlor of Tib’s home — *Tib’s home!* It was, of course, very different from their home in Deep Valley, but there were some familiar touches. Some of the paintings that had been in the Deep Valley home had been brought along, and they recognized those, some in the fancy gold frames, others in dark wood, along with portraits of family members. Of course, they recognized the one of Aunt Dolly, for they had gazed at it longingly so many times growing up, the beautiful full-length fashionable photo of Tib’s pretty aunt. The style of the furnishings had a familiar feel to it, certain touches that were so similar to the chocolate-colored Muller home in Deep Valley.

Officer Benedict sat down in one of the fancy-legged parlor chairs, his tall body and blue uniform looking out-of-place in this setting. He tapped his foot and looked at his watch. “I’m so glad we found the Muller’s home,” he said. “It was quite a treasure hunt to get here. I’m afraid that I’m going to have to leave you to the next leg of your

adventure, since I must get back to the station. I'll stay and meet Mr. Muller so that I know you are in safe hands, and then I must go. But if things don't work out then be sure to come back to the station and we'll do what we can to help." He looked hesitant to say this to them, but he smiled.

"Yes, we understand," said Betsy. "Thank you so much, Officer Benedict! You have helped us so much and spent so much time with us, and we really appreciate it. We couldn't have done it without you!" Tacy nodded in agreement.

The Officer shrugged. "Oh, I don't know about that, but I am happy to be of service, and happy to have succeeded in our mission. I just hope that you can go home and get everything figured out. You'll have to write to us at the station and tell us how it all goes. Happy news, I hope! But it sure is a mystery."

"We will!" said Tacy. "We write the best letters."

"I'm sure you do." Officer Benedict smiled.

They sat for another half hour, and then they heard the back door fly open, and the punch of fast footsteps on the floor. They could tell from the voices it was Tib and her brothers coming home from school. They heard Matilda's voice calling to them. And then, suddenly, there was Tib running into the parlor, her eyes big. She stopped and stared at them. Betsy and Tacy stood up, still holding hands. Tib blinked. "You're in my parlor!" she said, incredulously.

It was Just Like Tib to state the obvious! Betsy and Tacy gave a whoop and ran at their friend, throwing their arms around her, and they were all shouting and talking and laughing and jumping up and down with all the excitement. Officer Benedict laughed loudly and wiped his eyes.

After the burst of initial excitement calmed down, Betsy and Tacy tried to answer some of the questions Tib started firing at them as she kept looking back and forth between the two of them with a puzzled expression. It was all rather a confusing story to tell her, with so many details, and soon Mr. and Mrs. Muller came home, and they had to start over again. In the confusion of it all, Officer Benedict gave his more official brief rundown, and encouraged the more in-depth story to be carried on over dinner. He needed to leave, and Betsy and Tacy shook his hand, but then couldn't help giving him hugs and expressing their gratitude to him effusively. He gave a wave and a nod, and then went back out the front door to ride away with Cocoa and the buggy.

Matilda had made sauer braten for dinner with spaetzle, and it was quite a special feast. Betsy and Tacy sat one on either side of Tib and they each kept reaching out to squeeze her hand under the tablecloth; they were all so incredulous to actually be here and getting to see each other again. They sat at the dinner table a long time, even after coffee and dessert, because Betsy and Tacy were the special guests of the evening, and the Mullers wanted to hear every bit of their story. It had gotten to be quite a long story, even when they just "hit the high points" of some parts, like all the people they met along their journey and who helped them out. The key part, of course, was what had happened in Deep Valley, what they had discovered about the town before they left, and could Mr. Muller help?

Both Mr. and Mrs. Muller frowned and grew very serious to hear the reason that Betsy and Tacy had undertaken this long journey to Milwaukee. Deep Valley had been their home too, their community. "How can everyone be gone?" asked Mrs. Muller. "It doesn't make sense."

Mr. Muller cleared his throat. "I have heard many stories about mishaps with dinosaurs in my line of work, but never anything like this. The Tyrannosaurus rex is the most dangerous dinosaur to be sure, but it isn't physically possible for one to have eaten a whole town. So let's just take that off the table. I am sure we can solve this mystery; we must! Of course I will help you, my dear girls. We will do whatever it takes to get to the bottom of this. I am sure there is some reasonable explanation."

Betsy breathed out a sigh of relief and sunk into her chair. She looked over at Tacy and saw the same kind of relaxing going on for her. They had been carrying this huge bundle of tension and worry for all the days that had passed since Horace B. Lester's T. rex had swallowed him up and then rampaged their town. It seemed like ages ago now, and so many things had happened, with so many new experiences in the days since then. A lot of it felt unreal. But it had all happened, and they'd had to do so much of it on their own, all the while so worried about their town and their families. Now here was Mr. Muller saying he'd help, he'd take over, he'd figure out what was going on. They could finally relax, at least somewhat.

It was decided that Betsy and Tacy would sleep in Tib's room that night, and then in the morning they would bring Anker over from the police station and plan how they would tackle the mysterious situation in Deep Valley. Mr. Muller called over to the police station to let the officers and Anker know.

Then the girls were free to reconnect with their friend. Tib showed them her room, and they sat on her lavender bed spread and began to talk. Letters were never quite good enough. They wanted to hear about everything Tib had been up to, and to fill her in on their lives and the home, school and friends she had left behind.

They thought they would surprise Tib with their story about capturing Hugo the dinosaur and trying to turn him into a pet. But Tib, who had always been both brave and matter-of-fact, said, "That was a good idea, to lure the dinosaur with spinach. But if I was there, I would have just snuck up on him and grabbed him. I'm not afraid of dinosaurs, though maybe that T. rex. Too many teeth."

Tib told them about her new school, and about having to give up dancing. Her mother had really wanted graceful Tib to be a dancer, but her bowed legs made that impossible. So Tib was playing basketball on a girls' team. "I'm pretty good, too," said Tib.

"I bet you would be," said Tacy. "You're so fast."

She told them about Milwaukee and all the German aspects of it, the special customs and routines, and Betsy sighed. "It sounds so foreign! Like being in Europe. I would love it."

"It's good," said Tib. "And it's been really nice getting to see our grandparents, and uncles, aunts and cousins. There are so many! But it's not Deep Valley."

"Deep Valley is okay, but it's nothing special," said Betsy. She was so used to Julia always talking about The Great World, and that sounded so exotic and alluring to Betsy.

"You don't know," said Tib, pursing her lips. "You haven't had to leave it. Deep Valley is very special."

Betsy and Tacy looked at each other. They could feel the truth in what Tib was saying, and they took it seriously.

They talked and laughed until it was late and their eyelids drooped. They got ready for bed and then squished cozily into Tib's bed. "I never thought when I got up this

morning that I'd have you two in my room tonight," yawned Tib. "What a good surprise." They snuggled down into the covers and quickly fell asleep.

The next morning, they woke up when the house started to bustle with activity. Betsy and Tacy spent some time cleaning up at the sink; traveling was dirty business, and it was nice to get some warm water to wash up with. After dressing, the girls followed the aroma down the stairs to one of Matilda's breakfasts: eggs and sausages and biscuits and stewed apricots. There was more than enough food for everyone, including Anker, who showed up in the middle of breakfast. He had been driven to the Muller home by Officer Bennett, who Betsy and Tacy were glad to see. They introduced Anker and the officer to the Mullers.

And then there was a loud knock at the door, excessively loud, as if a bear was pounding down the door to get in. "Muller, you in there?" bellowed a deep voice.

Matilda shrieked and then ran to open the door, muttering "Lieber Gott." They heard the door open and then a large man in a navy suit stormed into the dining room where they all sat.

"Good, I'm glad you're here, Muller, we need to talk," said the thick-jowled man, his beady eyes scanning the room. He ran a hand through his oily black hair and then straightened his tie. "Looks like I'm in time for breakfast." He pulled out a chair to sit down.

Mr. Muller looked uncomfortable and cleared his throat. "Uh, welcome, Mr. Barhorst. We were just finishing..."

"I could use another breakfast," demanded the man, eyeing the platter of biscuits. "I smell bacon... do you have any more?" He looked over at Matilda, whose face was stern with dislike, her eyes burning holes through him. He didn't seem to notice, just

started piling biscuits on the empty plate in front of him. Matilda turned abruptly and left the room, returning in a moment with bacon and two more sunny-side up eggs.

Betsy stared at the man with fascination. He was big and rude and filled the room with his demanding personality. Mr. Muller was quiet and looked unhappy to see this man. The kids all sat quietly, the fear showing on their faces. But not Tib. Betsy looked at Tib, who shrugged and sat with her arms crossed across her chest. Tib generally liked everyone, but Betsy could tell by the lines furrowed across her forehead that she only barely tolerated Mr. Barhorst.

Mr. Barhorst inhaled a biscuit that he'd spread with jam. After a loud swallow, he said, "I hear we have a situation, but in Minnesota? Fill me in, Muller."

"Mr. Barhorst, first let me introduce you to these young ladies, Betsy Ray and Tacy Kelly. They are friends of my daughter, Thelma, from when we lived in Deep Valley, Minnesota." He turned to Betsy and Tacy, and addressed them. "Girls, Mr. Barhorst is my boss, Director of Dino Control Patrol in the greater Milwaukee region." He turned back to his boss, who was eating three pieces of bacon at once. "Sir, we were very surprised to have Betsy and Tacy appear at our door last night. They had traveled for days all on their own after a tragic event in Deep Valley involving a wild T. rex on the loose, and the mysterious disappearance of the whole population of the town. They came here to Milwaukee, despite being two young girls on their own, because they are friends with my Thelma and they knew I might be able to help them, with my work in Dino Control Patrol."

Mrs. Muller joined the conversation then. "We must help them. We have no choice. These girls are like my own children, and Deep Valley needs our help." She said this firmly to Mr. Barhorst, who didn't look at her but looked at the ceiling as he chewed.

“A whole town full of people disappeared, you say?” he asked. “Deep Valley is far out of our district. And we are overworked here already, as more dinosaurs have headed east here from California. I’m not sure we can help, Muller. We can’t go to Deep Valley. We are already understaffed.”

Mr. Muller stood up and frowned. “I must help these girls. They have come to me for help, and I will not let them down...”

“Alright, Muller, don’t get worked up now. I’m sure we can do something. Let’s start by contacting the branch in Southern Minnesota. They may not even know anything about this. That’s the logical place to start. Let’s look into this, follow the protocol and then we’ll go from there.”

Tib stood up then, small though she was, her voice was big. “This is an emergency! Papa, someone needs to go there now!”

Mr. Barhorst pounded on the table. “This is not an emergency for us! We have our own emergencies, and we need your father here. Patience, little girl, we will send help when we’ve exhausted our resources and looked into other possibilities. We can’t endanger Milwaukee to save Deep Valley, especially when there may be nothing to save there, from the sounds of it.”

“Sir, I don’t think — “Mr. Muller started.

“You work for me, Muller. You like your job, don’t you? Then just listen to me. I’m not being unreasonable, I’m not unwilling to help. We just need to take the time to go through the proper channels.”

Mr. Muller sat and put his head in his hands, sighing in frustration. “Children, I excuse you from the table. Why don’t you go play so we adults can discuss arrangements?”

Betsy, Tacy, Tib, Anker and her brothers quietly slipped away from the table. The air was heavy as they trudged upstairs.

Anker was the first one to speak. "That stinks."

"It sure does," said Tacy. "That man is horrible."

"I've never liked him," said Tib. "He's always so loud. But I've never heard him be so mean before."

"Do you really think he won't let your dad come and help us?" asked Betsy.

"I think Papa will insist on helping you, but it may take a little while."

The four of them sat on the back porch in grim silence, looking downwards, each of them puzzling about ideas. Betsy found her mind searching for solutions. They had come this far without much help from grownups, and now it looked like it would be up to them to come up with a solution on their own. It was a daunting thought, but she was suddenly sure they could do it. They had made it to Milwaukee one step at a time until they discovered a way to fly, so they could go back and figure this out, just the same.

"I don't think we should wait," she said firmly.

Tacy looked at her, eyebrows scrunched up as she thought, and then she nodded. "Me neither."

"Well, I'd hate to get Papa in trouble," said Tib.

"Oh, we don't want that either," said Betsy. "We know he needs his job. We wanted him to help, but if he can't, then we can do it ourselves."

Tib blinked. "But how?"

Betsy shook her head. "I don't know. Not yet, anyway. But Tacy and I didn't know how we'd get to Milwaukee at first, and we figured it out. We can figure this out too."

“We’re good figure-outers,” said Tacy, smiling. “It wasn’t easy, but we did it. We just did what we thought we needed to do next, as we went. We did it together, just our two brains working together. So just think of what our four brains can do!” She swung her hand to circle around, indicating all of them.

Anker nodded vigorously. “I’m in. Me and Todo have had to solve lots of problems on our own. I know it’s possible.”

“All right then,” said Tib. “I know Betsy and Tacy always come up with great ideas. We’ve worked on lots of things together.” She paused. “But how? Where do we start?”

“I think we need to get back to Deep Valley soon,” said Betsy. “We didn’t have much time to look around and look for clues before we left. Nothing felt safe after that T. rex had run amok. We’ll have to be careful, but we need to explore the possibilities of whatever happened to everyone there.”

“Maybe everyone would be back by the time we get there?” Tacy posed, her voice hopeful.

“Of course, that would be great,” said Betsy. “But we can’t count on that. We need to be prepared for... anything. Maybe we really can’t be prepared at all. But we can go in determined to figure it out.”

“But how do we get there quickly?” asked Tib. She looked at Anker. “Pterodactyls?”

“What else?” said Anker. “I don’t think we have other options, maybe a train, but that would be hard for us to make happen. And my girls are faster.”

“But there are four of us,” said Tib. “I want to go too.”

“I think we can make it work,” said Anker. He cocked his head and examined Tib, head to toe. “You’re rather petite. You could ride with me on Ditzzy. She would be able to carry both of us.”

“Okay,” said Tib.

Betsy marveled at their curly-haired friend. She’d never flown before, but she took the idea in stride, as if it was no big deal. Just like Tib had jumped in for a ride on the horseless carriage with Mrs. Poppy, Tib was ready to jump on the back of a pterodactyl and fly through the air!

“When should we leave?” asked Tib.

Betsy thought a moment, then said “As soon as possible. Waiting isn’t going to help anybody. But realistically, we should probably wait until tomorrow morning. We have to get supplies and plan our route and get ready. Do you think the girls can be ready by then?” she turned to Anker.

“Definitely,” he said.

Betsy asked Tib for a pad of paper and a pencil, and then the four of them set about making plans and brainstorming for how they would make this happen. Betsy loved making lists, and since she was a writer, she wrote everything down for them. Anker would go back to the police station and prepare the pterodactyls for another journey, feeding them and getting the harnesses ready. Betsy and Tacy would look over their supplies and come up with anything else they thought they might need, and Tib would help them get it. Tib would also have the job of sneaking into the pantry when Matilda was occupied elsewhere in the house or running an errand, and then they would take some food for nourishment on the journey. Then they would all four come together with maps to plan their journey to Deep Valley. Anker had never been there before, so

Betsy, Tacy and Tib would have valuable input. Tib seemed to have some skills with map reading and using the compass, which was helpful.

Of course, they were all doing this in secret, since they didn't want anyone, especially Tib's parents, to discover they were undertaking this rescue mission on their own. Tib confirmed that her parents would definitely not condone this mission and would try to stop them. So they talked in low voices and yet tried to act as normally as possible, that they were just doing some of their imaginary play like they were known to do, and chatted conversationally at lunch and dinner as if nothing was going on. Meanwhile they packed bags in Tib's room to have them ready, crammed the procured bread and cheese and cookies and apples in their bags, and Tib raided her piggy bank so that they had some money, just in case.

"This is just a loan," said Betsy, as Tib put the stopper back on her empty ceramic pig. "If we use it, we'll pay you back."

Tib shrugged. "I don't care. It's just money. I'd rather use it to make sure Deep Valley is okay than just have it sitting on my shelf."

"I still want us to pay it back," said Tacy.

In the evening as they consulted maps and planned their route, Anker gave Tib the basics about flying, since she would have no test run like Betsy and Tacy had. Tib nodded at all his instructions, listening carefully to him and then Betsy and Tacy as they explained to her about the details and experience of flying. Tib nodded seriously as she listened.

"Aren't you afraid?" Tacy asked, shivering as she remembered how scared she herself was the first time.

"Why should I be?" Tib said.

Betsy and Tacy looked at each other and smiled. It was their old familiar “that’s just like Tib” shared expression. Tib was so wonderfully blunt and brave, taking everything in stride and thinking nothing of it. She was so different from them in this way, and they were always thrilled and amazed at these qualities in their friend. She was a perfect complement to them.

By bedtime, they felt like they had everything worked out. Anker would be spending the night, sleeping on a cot in Freddie’s room. They’d all get up and have breakfast with the family, and Anker would leave right after to go to the police station and prepare the pterodactyls to fly again. Betsy, Tacy and Tib would need to leave the house with their big backpacks of supplies, so Tib would distract her mother and Matilda so that Betsy and Tacy could carry everything out. They had written a note to leave behind for her parents so that they’d know where the girls had gone. Tib was going to leave it on her pillow. And then the three of them would meet Anker at the police station and he’d have everything ready to go, with harnesses on the pterodactyls. All they would have to do is climb on and fly away. It sounded like a good plan, and they thought they could make it work. But as the girls squished into bed that night, they all felt jittery and talked until late. When Tacy tried to say, “What if...?” Betsy stopped her.

“Let’s not talk about it. It won’t help. Let’s talk about something else.”

They tried to shut their plans from their mind, talking to Tib about the kids back at home, their classmates and friends, and things she had missed being gone. That helped take their minds off of things. And then they slept.

They woke up quickly when Matilda rang the gong for the morning call to breakfast. They hadn’t gotten a lot of sleep, but adrenaline hit their systems as they remembered they were going to escape today, and that jolted them awake. They dressed

and washed and then went down for breakfast. Mr. Muller had already left for work, so it was just the kids and Mrs. Muller. They had a filling and delicious breakfast of oatmeal and cream and stewed fruits and eggs. The four of them didn't talk much, focused on eating a good breakfast and tried to look casual, as if nothing special was happening. They answered Mrs. Muller's questions politely. Then they asked to be excused. Anker left for the police station and gave the girls a serious look before he left, an unspoken "see you soon."

And then the girls did their part of the plan. They made Tib's bed and put the note on the pillow. Betsy and Tacy loaded their heavy bags on their backs, and waited in the bedroom while Tib went downstairs and distracted her mother and Matilda, getting them to help her find her lost pocketbook in the kitchen (Tib had planted it there the night before). When Betsy and Tacy heard the muffled voices in the kitchen, they quietly but quickly walked down the stairs and out the front door. They were down the street and ready to cross the corner when Tib opened the front door, running to catch up to them.

"I don't think they suspected anything," she said, a little out of breath.

"I see you found your pocketbook," teased Betsy, nodding at the brown purse strapped over Tib's shoulder.

"Why wouldn't I?" Tib asked, puzzled. "It was right where I hid it."

Betsy smiled and sighed. "Never mind, Tib."

The girls hurried along, occasionally looking over their shoulders to make sure no one had figured out their plan. They arrived at the police station and walked around to the garage that housed all the police horses and buggies, where the pterodactyls were staying. They marched across the hay-strewn ground, finding Anker and the dinosaurs

in a large wooden pen in the back. Anker was concentrating on getting the last harness on Ditzzy.

“What can we do to help?” asked Tacy. Her usually pale cheeks were flushed red from the nervous excitement of their plans getting set in motion.

“Can you help me bring Mitzy and Fritzzy outside? There’s a grassy area off to the side, and we should be able to take off from there.” He pulled the harness straps tight, then tighter still.

Betsy and Tacy guided and pulled the dinosaurs outside, while Tib loaded herself down with the provisions and brought those. The sky darkened as a large cloud passed in front of the sun. The girls divided up the provisions into three bags, so the dinosaurs would carry equal weight. And then Tib watched carefully as Betsy and Tacy climbed into the wooden seats and strapped themselves into the harnesses. They put on their goggles and readied themselves for flight, patting their eager pterodactyls who were jazzed up and ready to go.

Anker brought Ditzzy and then helped Tib into the seat. She would be sitting in front of him as he flew, since she was small enough for him to see around. Tib strapped on her goggles and looked as determined and brave as Betsy had ever seen her before. They were used to Tib being brave, but it still impressed Betsy every time. Tib patted Ditzzy, who was prancing a bit in anticipation, and held tight to the side harness with one hand.

“Almost ready,” he called out to the girls. “I’ll just get the rest of our stuff.”

He turned away and reached down for the last remaining bag. Tacy screamed as Mr. Muller and Officer Bennet came into view, running toward them. “Hey!” shouted the officer, bursting forward and reaching out to grab Anker’s arm. Anker dropped the

cloth bag and jumped, trying to break free from the hand, but Officer Bennet held on fast, and then Mr. Muller dove at him, knocking him down. Anker was trapped.

For one brief moment, the world stood still. Betsy and Tacy stared in horror beneath the dancing and nervous squawks of Mitzy and Fritzzy, wings flapping. And then Tib frowned fiercely, her hand quickly tightening her own harness and shouted “Go!” In one smooth motion, Ditzzy ran and sailed into the air, her wings flapping quickly to get off the ground.

Fear gripped Betsy’s heart, but she knew they had to act quickly. “Go!” she echoed, nudging Fritzzy to take off, then the flap of wings and she rose into the air. She looked over at Tacy and had a surge panic that her friend would be left behind, but she saw the determined look on Tacy’s face as she nudged Mitzy and took off.

Betsy felt her heart pounding fast along with the beating of the pterodactyl wings. She looked down on the chaotic scene as they rose above the heads of the three below, Anker struggling against the officer and Tib’s father, all of them pausing to stare in shock at the girls flying away, and then Mr. Muller letting go of Anker to jump and try to reach one of the dinosaurs (futile, since they were already too high), shouting, “No! Come back! Tib, I order you to come back!”

Tib shook her head. “Sorry Papa!” she called down. “I must do this!”

Anker broke free from Officer Bennet, and began to jump up and down. “Go go go! You can do it! Keep on flying!” He seemed pretty excited by this development. “Yes, it works,” he pumped his arm in victory.

“Sorry Anker,” Betsy called as they were almost out of range.

He screamed loud, his hands cupped around his mouth to deliver his message. “It’s okay, I’ll be fine. See you later!”

And then, they were up and away, on their own in the morning sky.

Chapter 12: And Then There Were Three

Betsy signaled to Fritzzy so that she could fly alongside Tib. “Are you okay?” she called. She was acutely aware that Tib had never flown before at all, but then again, if anyone could do this, she was sure Tib could.

“Yes! It’s pretty fun. I don’t know what I’m doing, but I’ll figure it out.” Tib was grinning, her curls tossing around every which way by the wind.

“Tib, you’re the best!” shouted Betsy. She looked over at Tacy, who was now such a natural at flying that there was not fear in her eyes anymore. “You too, Tacy!” And then, with a gulp, she nudged Fritzzy forward and took the lead. When they’d gotten beyond the skirmish on the ground, Betsy had realized that she was going to have to be the leader, since she’d been the one to study the maps with Anker and go over their route. It was intimidating to think of trying to stay on course, by using a map and a compass. Her plan at this point was to land more frequently to check their location and make sure they were on course.

They flew for a few hours that morning. Betsy was busy thinking about the flying, the directions Anker had gone over with her, looking for landmarks, and making sure Tacy and Tib were doing okay. For a few minutes her mind would wander, and then she’d worry about what they would do when they got home to Deep Valley. Their trip had certainly not gone the way she’d thought it would — none of it, really. Starting off from Deep Valley, she and Tacy had thought they’d walk the whole way (and they’d still be walking, if that had been the case). They’d had no idea all the people they would meet, or that they’d find Anker and his pterodactyls to help them travel so much faster. And they’d thought they’d get help from adults, from the Dino Patrol and Mr. Muller, or

even the police department. They hadn't thought they might be going back to Deep Valley alone to figure things out on their own. It was a troublesome thought, but then again, she knew they were smart and creative and very capable, and if any three kids could do it, they certainly could. She knew they had to have fierce determination and not let anxious thoughts get in the way of doing what they needed to do. She gritted her teeth as the wind brushed her face.

In late morning, Betsy looked out for a clear field where they could land in. It was time to check in with her friends to see how they were all doing, and talk about their plans, now that Anker wasn't with them. Tib and Tacy followed her signals to land, and soon they were on the ground. "Tib, you fly like you've done this a hundred times," said Tacy as they unharnessed themselves and tended to the pterodactyls.

Tib shrugged. "I don't know, it just feels easy to me. And I like it, flying with the birds. Remember when we were all trying to be birds when we were little?"

They all smiled at the memory. "Betsin, Tacin and Tibbin," said Betsy, looking a little chagrined. She glared at her friends. "And YES, I remember that I cheated my way out of flying out of that tree that day. But look, I'm flying now."

Tacy laughed. "Aw, don't feel bad about that. Little Betsin was pretty smart to trick her way out of flying. She was scared. And yes, you're REALLY flying now."

They assessed their supplies, which were only 2/3 of what they thought they would have, since one of their satchels got left behind with Anker. They had less food and water than they planned, and some of the dinosaur food Anker had packed too. Now they would have to figure out how to care for Mitzy, Fritzzy and Ditzzy themselves, as well as navigating on their own as well. Fortunately, Betsy and Tacy had several days of having watched Anker and how he did all this. They didn't feel entirely confident, but by

necessity, they were determined to figure everything out themselves. Over their long picnic lunch of bread and cheese and dried meat and water, they discussed and planned out more details of their journey. And just as Betsy had suspected, Tib was a very useful traveling companion, having learned many practical skills by working in her mother's kitchen and helping her father as he worked around the house.

They got into a routine over the next few days, flying for long stretches in the mornings, a break for lunch, then more flying in the afternoons. In late afternoon, they would locate a favorable spot to land (some spots were more favorable than others, but they had to make do), then descend to rest, eat, take care of the pterodactyls, look at the map and talk over their plans.

Their packed food supply dwindled, and they also had to consider how to feed the dinosaurs. Luckily, they had the fishing supplies with them, so they kept an eye out for lakes and rivers to land by. Tib knew how to fish and was pretty good at it. Tacy had fished once or twice with her brothers, so she helped a little. Betsy had only ever read about fishing, so she watched in fascination and took notes in her head so she'd be able to write about fishing if she wanted to.

One night they managed to start a fire and cooked some fish for themselves by poking the dead fish on sticks and holding them over the fire. This was just one of the ways that Betsy felt wild.

It was odd, because she'd grown up a city girl in a nice house with nice clothes, and all the modern conveniences. She'd played outside and got dirty, of course, but there was always a bath available to clean up. She and Tacy had been on this adventure a few weeks now and baths were a luxury, few and far between. Even a jug of water and a wash rag were rare. All three of them were dirty and getting dirtier, their bodies, their

clothes, their hair. At first on this adventure, Betsy and Tacy had talked about feeling filthy, uncomfortable about it, unkempt, uncivilized. But now, it was funny how used to it they had gotten. It felt okay, natural even, and she wasn't disliking the wildness of it all. It felt real and raw and earthy, and she was really in touch with how physical life is, what the body can do. Sure, she would be glad to have a bath and get back to dressing nicely when this was all over, but she was learning a lot about herself and about life on this adventure.

They were losing track of time in this new routine of their days, but eventually they realized they really were getting near to Deep Valley. Tacy was the one who spotted Murmuring Lake. "Oh look, look!" she called loudly and pointed to them.

"I see the cabins!" shouted Betsy. "And there's Mama's old house." Her heart thumped happily to see something so familiar and beloved. Then she felt the inner dark cloud pass over these sunny thoughts. It had been so long now since she had seen her family. How were they? Were they okay? Was there a life with baths and clean clothes for her to even return to anymore?

"It won't be too long now," called Tib. "Let's take our lunch here, okay?"

It was a good place for them to land, to gather their thoughts and their resolve for what they hoped would be the last leg of their trip. It was nice to be in such a comforting location, since they all had memories of hot summer days swimming in this lake and sitting on porches catching the breeze.

"I'm worried," said Tacy as they talked about flying into Deep Valley, which they would surely do by that afternoon.

"It won't help to worry," said Tib. "We've got to be strong. Whatever happens, we can deal with it. Look at all the things you and Betsy have done already! I am so

impressed, because I know how hard these days of flying and camping are. We're all getting stronger every day."

"Thanks, Tib," said Betsy, reaching out to touch her friend's arm. "You're right. We ARE strong, and we need to go into this situation knowing that."

"Okay." Tacy nodded. "No more worrying."

They ate a small lunch, rationing themselves on the dried beef and bread, since they had so little left. They didn't know what to expect in Deep Valley. They didn't want to assume anything about anything, even food availability.

Soon they were back in the air, and all the terrain started looking more familiar to them. Betsy didn't need to look at the map or the compass anymore. She could follow the roads that her family had traveled by horse and buggy so many times.

Before they knew it, it was mid-afternoon and they were seeing rooftops of buildings that looked as familiar as the back of their hands. They all looked at each other, beaming, and even though they were determined to have no worries about what they would find, Betsy was sure they were all gulping just like she was. She was also determined to do what she would need to do to save her town, if needed.

They decided to land in a grassy area by the river next to Front Street.

Flying over, they had all been aware of the desolate scene of Deep Valley below them. Betsy and Tacy had been a little prepared for this, since this was the state of the town when they'd left. Tib was a little more shocked to see Deep Valley this way, a ghost town empty of humans, some buildings, trees and houses damaged or destroyed, the town bereft of the life and energy they'd always known. They spotted a few dinosaurs poking around, a stegosaurus and a few ankylosaurus looking to see what they could

find to eat. For the most part, the town was empty and abandoned. It made their hearts heavy to see it, and Betsy felt a knot in the pit of her stomach.

Now, on the ground they set about taking care of what they needed to first, securing the pterodactyls in a large shed by the river, removing the harnesses, laying their packs on the ground. "It's so weird to think that it was just a few weeks ago that Horace B. Lester arrived with his dinosaur show," said Betsy.

"I know," said Tacy. "It seems like forever now."

Tib looked around, paler than she usually was. "That must be his trailer," she said, pointing over by the library.

Betsy and Tacy turned and nodded, seeing that the trailer that had arrived with such excitement was still standing where they'd last seen it -- well, sort of standing as half of it was blown apart, loose boards laying on the ground from when the T. rex had broken out of the trailer. Betsy shivered remembering how close up they'd been to the huge teeth, and a flashback of Teddy gulping down Mr. Lester. She shook her head to get the memory out of her head.

"All right, let's get these girls fed and resting, and then we'll have a look around," said Betsy. She needed the routine of taking care of the dinosaurs to settle down her racing heart. They were here, at long last, and things did not look good so far.

But the routine helped. As did taking care of themselves by taking the time to drink water and nibble a snack, so they'd have energy to explore. They each had a handful of the raisins and nuts that Tib had stolen from Matilda's pantry.

Next they set off, Betsy, Tacy and Tib, holding hands like they used to when they were little. First they went over to their Hill Street neighborhood. They were eager to see their homes and if there was any sign of their families. They walked by Tib's chocolate-

colored house. It looked good. Tib said her family still owned it, and they had been renting it out to a family since they'd moved to Milwaukee. (Betsy and Tacy had always hoped that meant Tib might move back to Deep Valley from Milwaukee someday.) The house looked fine, still stately and intact. Tib breathed a sigh of relief.

They walked on to Betsy and Tacy's houses. They were still intact too, and in fact, still looked the same as when Betsy and Tacy had left them. The houses still looked a bit disheveled inside, as if their families had left in a hurry, a bit of disarray. At least a huge dinosaur hadn't knocked them down, as some of the houses they'd seen on their walk.

Tacy sighed heavily, and looked at Betsy, her face dirty and discouraged. "It's no difference," she said. "What if we never find out what happened to them? What if...?"

Betsy put her arm around her. She was worried and scared too, but she knew they'd have to be strong. They couldn't give into these fears or they'd never be able to get to the bottom of all this. "Sshh...We'll figure it out. It will be fine. We'll do everything we have to do."

Tib put her arm around Tacy too, and they all stood there with their scary feelings and their braveness, all at once.

Tacy bit her lip and nodded. "Okay. I know. We can do this. Look how far we've come already."

They decided to walk back downtown, to see if they could find any clues that would help them solve this mystery.

They passed Bradley Street and Clark Street and Lincoln Park and the library. They walked the empty streets downtown, saw the Melborn Hotel which had a crashed front window and looked sadly shabby now. They stopped at the grocers to look for

some food that they could add to their supply. "I'm sure Mr. Smith wouldn't mind if we took it, if he knew we were trying to help Deep Valley, right?" said Tacy.

"Don't be worried about stealing," said Tib. "We are only doing what we have to do. We're warriors in a battle."

"I like that," said Betsy. "I do feel a little like a warrior. I like the idea of a girl warrior."

"That's what we are," confirmed Tacy.

And then they wandered over to the Lion's Department Store, with the golden lion statues out front. They each remembered the times they had shopped there with their mothers. It usually was a place of promise for them, with the mannequins all dressed up in the windows and all the bright shiny new things to buy. Now it looked sad, with the windows gray and the wind whistling down the empty street.

"Remember our Christmas shopping trips?" said Tacy, "where we'd go to every store and pick out our favorite things at every place?"

"And in the end we'd just buy one ornament, every year?" said Betsy.

"That was always so fun," said Tib.

"It sounds like a marvelous idea!" came a strange, mellifluous and cheery voice from behind them. The three girls startled, abruptly turning around. Tib raised up her hands in front of her like a boxer, ready to lash out if necessary. Who could it be?

There, leaning against the fancy metal hitching post next to the street behind them, was a long and lean figure in purple and red. On first glance they thought it was a tall man, but as they looked with mouths gaping open, they realized it was a woman, a most unusual woman.

She had a puffy cloud of bright red hair, much brighter than Tacy's auburn locks. It swirled into cotton candy curls floating around her head. She wore a tall brown hat with a brim, a man's fashion but it looked stylish on her. Little wiry glasses perched on the end of her pointy nose, barely big enough for her snappy green eyes, and while she was definitely an adult, it was hard to tell how old she might be. There was a shimmering filter about her skin, so that one moment she looked like a young woman, and then a little turn of her head made her seem older, and then, looking down, she seemed ageless.

She wore a long fitted purple jacket over a frilly white shirtwaist, and she looked as fashionable as any model in the women's magazines from the waist on up. Instead of a skirt, she wore tailored purple pants over pointy-toed boots, lending a more masculine detail to the ensemble. Betsy, Tacy and Tib stared at her with wide eyes, fascinated by her. A big pocket watch dangled on a chain from her jacket pocket, and she held a golden screwdriver in one of her hands.

"I know many people make Christmas shopping a hobby, especially since Dickens got them going on celebrating Christmas in style, but I love your twist on the idea, shopping with your eyes and only buying one ornament in the end. Delightful!" The woman spoke in a quick British accent. Betsy had always wanted to hear one in real life.

"I, uh, err," Betsy stammered, at a loss for what to say to this stranger, the only other person they'd seen in Deep Valley since the T. rex incident. "Who...?"

The woman spoke fast and bright, as if she was in a whirlwind. She held out her hand. "Do forgive my rudeness. Here I come up and eavesdrop on her conversation and then butt my way in. You must be Betsy, and Tacy, and Tib," she said, grasping and

shaking each of their hands as they each held them up in automatic politeness. “It is so good to meet you, girls.”

“How did you know who we are?” asked Tacy, mesmerized by the stranger and her accoutrements.

“Oh, I’ve spent many days in Deep Valley now, researching, getting a handle on what has gone on here. You three are an important part of this town. Not only do the walls tell me all about you, but the dinosaurs too.” The strange woman turned and waved her hand with the screwdriver towards the Big Hill, where dinosaurs often roamed.

Tib stared at her quizzically. “So the walls and dinosaurs talk to you? Who are you?”

The green eyes came back to smile at them. “Oh, you can just call me Doctor.” She paused, waiting.

“Doctor who?” asked the three girls.

“Well, some call me precisely that. But just Doctor will suffice,” said the woman. “Walls and dinosaurs are very good sources of information, sometimes that is. Depending on which ones. Some walls are completely observant and fascinating, and some just spend their whole life asleep. The same can be said of the dinosaurs. But this time, they’ve filled me in well on the situation.”

The girls gave the Doctor a long, quizzical stare. They weren’t quite sure what to make of this woman or what she was saying. Listening to walls and dinosaurs? Did she think they were five years old and still believing fairy stories? Betsy loved fiction, of course, and using her imagination. But they’d never run into an adult who talked this

way before, and yet, here was an adult who knew about them, knew what had happened, and seemed like she was available to help them.

Betsy and Tacy and Tib looked at each other and seemed to be telegraphing these thoughts to each other. They needed help. Here was someone who might help them. Even if she was saying somewhat crazy things, she still sounded logical and didn't seem to be dangerous. If she was really a doctor, she was probably smart enough to make a difference for them. Betsy nodded, then both Tib and Tacy did too, all of them in agreement.

"Can you help us, Doctor?" Betsy asked.

The Doctor bowed with a flourish and a twirl of her hand. "Bien sur. It will be my pleasure. After all, that is why I am here."

"You're here because of us?" asked Tib, scrunching her forehead. "How did you know?"

The Doctor stood and shrugged. "Oh, you know, walls and dinosaurs putting out a call for help and all that. It's not important. I'm here and together we will figure this out. I know you want your town back, your families back. A mystery, how exciting. I love a good mystery, don't you?"

"Like Sherlock Holmes?" asked Tacy. "I've read a few of his stories."

"Oh yes, funny chap," said the Doctor, then wrinkled her nose. "Actually, not funny. Very serious. Brilliant but very strange. Watson is much better company at tea. But yes, solving mysteries like that. It takes some practice. I'm glad you've read a few."

Betsy scratched her head. She hadn't really thought about this as an actual mystery to solve, but that made sense. "But where do we start?" asked Betsy. "There doesn't seem to be any information to go on."

The Doctor nodded. "Information is always a good place to start, examining the facts of what we already know. You girls have a head start on this. I need to catch up. I would love it if we could sit down to a cup of tea and let me hear what you know."

Betsy and Tacy looked at each other, puzzled. "Tea sounds really good," said Tacy. "But were in the middle of a broken-up ghost town right now..."

"Oh, I know!" said Tib. "How about the Melborn Hotel? We've always wanted to go there! I bet if we poked around in their kitchen, we'd find some tea."

"A splendid idea!" agreed the Doctor. "That's just what this situation calls for – thinking outside the box. When life hands you lemons and all that. But more than that, when you have an unconventional problem, you can't let convention get in your way. So let's off to the Melborn for tea!" She gave a wave of her golden screwdriver, and they all started walking. At least having this new character on the scene was distracting them from the anxiety that had weighed them down. It was turning into more hopeful things like adventure and mystery.

Chapter 13: Of Tea, Travel, and TARDIS

Soon they were back at the Melborn, the grand four-story hotel that they'd always admired, with its many arching windows. None of the girls had been in it yet (although Betsy's parents had dined in the fancy hotel restaurant on a special occasion, so she'd heard all about it). It seemed too bad for this to be their introduction to it, since it had gotten battered in all the commotion of a few weeks ago. They entered the front door carefully, with the Doctor in the lead, being careful of broken glass and bricks as they made their way through the darkened hotel.

They found the dining room and the large restaurant kitchen. There were so many cupboards! The girls watched as the Doctor stood straight and pointed her screwdriver at a cupboard, then slowly shifted it clockwise, little by little, focusing hard. Then, "Bingo! There it is!" She walked to the cupboard she was pointing at, opened the door and snatched up a box of English Breakfast tea. "You never fail me," she said to her screwdriver, then gave it a quick kiss.

"That screwdriver helps you find tea?" Tib asked, cocking her head to the side.

The Doctor giggled. "Girls, meet my Sonic Screwdriver. It thankfully does help me find tea, but it does so much more than that. You'll see. But for now, let's put the kettle on and have a chat."

The Doctor found a large water kettle on the giant iron stove, and Tib, who'd always had a knack for working in kitchens, scurried around opening cupboards until she found a blue ceramic tea pot. More searching while the water boiled revealed a stash of cookies and even a package of British biscuits, which the Doctor loved. "Oh, this makes me feel right at home," she crowed. "Well, at least for one of my homes, in ye olde

London. Tea and biscuits are almost crucial for the start of any great adventure.” She winked at the girls.

“London!” Betsy sighed. “Oh, I do hope to see the Great World sometime.”

“We’ve seen so much these last few weeks and gone to Milwaukee and back,” said Tacy. “I’m just looking forward to being home after this, if we ever get our homes back.”

“Of course you will,” said the Doctor. They were seated around the table in the kitchen, with plates and tea cups and scavenged cookies and biscuits. “Worry not. The tea is ready. Why don’t you tell me your story, girls?”

So they did, Betsy and Tacy telling of the beginnings with Horace B. Lester and the T. rex and how they came to journey on foot to Milwaukee, meeting up with Anker and flying on pterodactyls, and finding Tib. Tib excitedly jumped in to continue the story of trying to get help from Dino Control Patrol, then their escape from Milwaukee and journey back to Deep Valley. “I couldn’t really believe it until I saw it,” said Tib. “The destruction, and the empty town. It doesn’t make sense. Where did everyone go?”

“Yes, indeed. When did everyone go?” nodded The Doctor, deep in thought.

“You mean ‘where.’ Not ‘when,’” Tacy pointed out.

The Doctor’s eyes danced. “Oh, did I say ‘when?’ I meant ‘when.’”

“Hey!” Betsy sat up. “Are you tricking us?”

“Oh no, not I,” insisted The Doctor, standing up. “It’s just that sometimes it’s helpful to change up the questions we ask about a situation, even if it might not make logical sense.” The Doctor started pacing back and forth in the kitchen, brow furrowed. “Sometimes good old loveable logic just sends you into a dead end. So if we change up the questions every which way, it can help us think outside the box, as I was telling you.”

Outside the box? It seemed to Betsy that they were trying to do a lot of that on this whole adventure, starting with walking on their own to Milwaukee, and ending up flying around on pterodactyls. And now this nice-but-kind-of-crazy Doctor-lady. They were sure being open to new ideas. So okay then, how about new questions? Even illogical ones?

Betsy jumped up and faced her friends. "Okay then, new questions. We can do this. Where did they go? When did they go? How did they go?"

Tacy clapped her hands, ready to play. "Who did they go? Why did they go?"

Tib frowned and crossed her arms. "I don't get it."

"Aw, come on, Tib." Tacy pulled on her hand. "It's just a game. With words. That's all we're doing."

"Just think of weird questions. We're brainstorming!" said Betsy.

"Yes!" said The Doctor, beaming.

"How long did they go?" asked Tacy.

"How high did they go?" asked Betsy.

They looked at each other, then together said, "How low did they go?"

Tib raised a hand, ready to make her point. "So you say we need to think outside the box, but I just keep thinking 'inside.' That word won't get out of my head. Why can't we think inside the box?"

They all stopped and looked at her, and all was quiet in the kitchen. "Indeed," said the Doctor, rubbing her chin. "That's excellent, Tib. Sometimes thinking inside the box is exactly the right thing, especially if it's exactly the right box." She turned and waved her Sonic Screwdriver in the air, and then they heard a whoosh and an odd humming-pulsing noise.

There, before their eyes, materialized a tall blue box, like the pictures of British police boxes that Betsy had seen in her books. It looked big enough for a person or two to stand in, and had small windows around the top edge of the box, below the words “Police – Public Call – Box.” A white sign on the left door read, “Police Telephone, Free for Use of Public, Advice & Assistance Obtainable Immediately, Officers & Cars Respond to All Calls, Pull to Open.”

The girls stared with gaping mouths at this new thing that had materialized out of thin air in front of them. Yes, they had dinosaurs and flew on pterodactyls and all that, but this was definitely the weirdest thing that had happened to them so far. “What is it?” squeaked Tacy, looking pale.

“Girls, I introduce to you the TARDIS,” the Doctor said with a flourish. “And because I can see the next question on your faces, TARDIS stands for ‘Time and Relative Dimensions in Space.’ Since I didn’t have any flying pterodactyls when I first started out, this is how I get around.”

Tib stepped forward, eyes gleaming. “I like it! I get the feeling you could go anywhere in that box. Can we ride in it with you?”

Betsy and Tacy exchanged glances and gulped. It was just like Tib, so eager to jump on board something new. She hadn’t been afraid of the horseless carriage and had sweet-talked the Poppy’s for a ride. She hadn’t been afraid of riding the pterodactyls either. And now this TARDIS-thing.

“Certainly,” replied the Doctor. “I love to have company on my adventures in the TARDIS. We just need to do a little thinking first, on when and where we need to go.”

Betsy paused. “When you say ‘when and where,’ do you mean...?”

-- a time machine!" interrupted Tib. "Is this a time machine? My papa has some special science stories, and some of them have time machines in them. I'd love to ride in a time machine."

Tacy looked afraid. Betsy looked worried. Tib noticed their faces and grabbed their hands. "Aw, come on. It's not so strange, and probably nothing to be really afraid of. I mean, we're already living with dinosaurs, aren't we, and that was pretty weird!"

The Doctor nodded sympathetically. "It's okay, my dears. Nobody has to ride in the TARDIS. Even though it's actually marvelous, mysterious and undeniably fun. Even though it's always one of the best way to really dig into a problem that needs to be solved. But not necessary at all."

Betsy gulped. She wasn't quite as adventurous as Tib, but she also didn't want to pass by opportunities because of fear. That was no way to live a life. Then you'd end up just living in your own little town staying safe, and never getting to see the Great World. Besides, she wanted to be a writer, and writers need to have interesting experiences. She knew that much. They'd already been so brave and faced so much on this journey, so why not a time machine. She reached for Tacy's hand and squeezed it. "We're going to come along. We need to."

The Doctor smiled and pushed the doors open. What should have been a cramped space they would all have to crowd into was actually a whole large room on the inside. The Doctor laughed at their wide eyes as they followed her in. The space was lit by a brightly lit multi-colored unit in the center, pipes and tubes and dials and gears and levers, lights flashing. The girls walked slowly around the unit, taking it in while the Doctor started pushing buttons and spinning dials. The unit clicked and beeped into life, and the numbers on the display started going up. The Doctor instructed the girls to have

a seat, and she paced with her hand on her chin, concentrating, then spinning a dial here, pressing a lever there. This went on for a while, then the whole room started shaking. Betsy felt her heart racing, looked over at Tacy who had her eyes squeezed tight, and then Tib, who was bouncing in her seat from excitement. “Here we go,” she thought, wondering just what they’d gotten themselves into now.

The Doctor became even more energized as the machine whirred and hummed and buzzed. She hopped around as if it was a dance between her and the machine, jumping here to push a button, springing up on tiptoes to reach a lever, then bowing low to read a spinning dial.

The room shook harder and there seemed to be a movement upward, then zig zags to the right and left. The girls just held onto their seats.

After what felt like a bumpy ride, the Doctor spun a giant wheel and announced, “There, that should do it!” The movement of the room sped up, reaching a crescendo, and then abruptly stopped, with a sound like air rushing out a tunnel. The girls looked at each other with big eyes as their stomach dropped and excitement buzzed through them. The Doctor clapped her hands and smiled. “Shall we take a look?”

She walked over and put her hand on the door. The girls quietly got up and followed her, full of a mixture of nervousness, fear and excitement. What would be beyond the doors.

Betsy, Tacy and Tib stood back away and held their breaths as the doors swung open. There before them lay deep blackness, even though it was still daytime, the most peaceful stillness they could imagine, and the sparkle of dots of light. They all leaned forward to see better. None of them could believe their eyes.

“Are we in Space?” asked Betsy in a hushed tone of awe.

“Like, up there?” asked Tib, pointing her finger up.

The Doctor smiled. “Indeed, we are. This isn’t part of solving our mystery, but I just thought you intrepid spirits needed to see it. Sshh, don’t tell, but Science will make way for humans to go into space, but not many women will have this opportunity. Since we’re on an adventure, I thought this was a worthy detour. I know you girls will do great things with such a kernel of experience under your belt.”

“Wow,” breathed Tacy, and then she peered out even more, looking down. “Is that, um, Earth?”

“Yes, my dears. The blue planet you call home. Beautiful, isn’t she?”

All the trio could do was nod and drink it in.

And then it was time to move on. The Doctor closed the doors and they all went back to the center of the TARDIS. “Next stop, Deep Valley!”

“But we were just there!” cried Betsy.

“Not quite.” The Doctor’s eyebrows scrunched in concentration as she began spinning dials and pulling levers, high and low. “You’ll see.” The TARDIS began to shake again.

They could feel the TARDIS dropping and spinning. The girls sat in their seats and held on to their handles tightly. They had gone to Space! Betsy thought. Now what would happen? She was sure, whatever it was, even in Deep Valley, it would be magical.

When the TARDIS slowed to a stop and the Doctor opened the door with a flourish, they saw they were indeed back in Deep Valley. The girls looked up at their leader.

“You said it wasn’t the same,” said Tib.

“Look and see.” The Doctor waved them out of the box.

The girls stepped out onto the street they knew and loved so well, Hill Street, right by their bench. It all looked the same as when they had just left, but wait. Tacy pointed down the street. "There are people here! It isn't deserted! There's Paul going into my house!" Her voice rose with excitement and she started to run forward. The Doctor held her firmly back.

"Just a minute. There's something I need to tell you first, girls." The Doctor looked more serious than they'd seen her so far. "We are just here as observers. You won't be able to interact with anyone, not even your families. They cannot see you. We have gone back in time a few weeks ago, when that toothy T. rex was beginning his rampage. Let's see what was happening on this side of town at the time."

The girls nodded, and then the Doctor let them go. They stepped forward carefully, as if the ground was soft. It was good to see their homes again, a normal day, with the people they knew and loved coming and going as usual.

"So this must've been when Tacy and I were running away downtown, hiding in that narrow alley from the T. rex," Betsy said quietly, under her breath.

Tacy nodded, then pointed up the street. "Look, there's Herbert and Tom, running this way."

"They're running like lightning," Tib said, voice hushed.

The boys were just as Betsy and Tacy had seen them last, as they waited with their tickets to go to see the dinosaur. They yelled loudly as they ran, making neighbors on the street turn and look. Mr. Ray came out of his house (Papa! Betsy's heart leapt). Tom and Herbert ran right up to him, their shirts untucked, so breathless they couldn't talk for a moment.

“What is it?” Mr. Ray asked, his face full of concern. He put his hands on their arms as they recovered a minute. Then Herbert was able to gasp out--

“T. rex... got loose! It ate... Mr. Lester! Now it’s... running everywhere... crashing down houses... going after people!”

Tom took over then. “We gotta hide or something... get away! He’s coming... he could eat everybody!”

Mr. Ray stood up straight then, his face full of the trouble, but also concentration. “You’re right, boys. We need to do something. Help me round everyone up, go to every house down here. Tell them to come out. I don’t know what next, but we’ll figure something out.”

The girls stood by their bench, holding their breaths, watching the commotion. There was a lot of shouting and loud instructions as people started coming out of their houses. Mr. Ray got everyone out of the little yellow cottage, and Betsy was so glad to see her mother, Margaret, Julia, all there. Tacy saw the trickle of her mother and father, then many of her brothers and sisters, all coming to huddle on the street. Doors slammed, and Mr. Ray and Mr. Kelly stood talking together, arms pointing here and there, trying to work things out.

It was then in all the commotion that the girls heard the clip-clop of horses’ hooves. They turned and saw a rare sight in their neighborhood, a fancy black and gold carriage being pulled by four brown horses. Behind the driver sat a tall thin man with white hair and a long white beard. “Mr. Meecham!” whispered Tib.

There was so much anxious activity on the street that at first, no one noticed. Mr. Meecham stood and got down from his carriage, his clothes looking as rich as if he’d just stepped out of a museum portrait. A dark cape draped down from his shoulders and

swayed as he walked tall and stately over to Mr. Ray and Mr. Kelly. They startled in surprise.

“I heard you had a situation over here, with some dinosaur. I came to see if I could be of some assistance,” he told them.

The crowd on the street noticed the carriage and the men talking, and people started to gather around. Mr. Meecham was an iconic figure in town, the richest man who had come to Deep Valley from the East long ago. He owned the area called Little Syria on the other side of the Big Hill. He lived there too, mostly keeping to himself in his big house.

Mr. Ray clasped his hand. “Mr. Meecham, we do need help! We’re trying to figure out how to save our people. We’re not sure. Where we can go?” His face looked very troubled.

Betsy and Tacy looked at each other and gulped. It was hard to see their fathers so upset.

“I always knew all this dinosaur business was bound to create trouble,” said Mr. Meecham. His voice was both quivery with age, and gruff. “I never thought it was a good idea at all.” He sighed heavily, pursing his lips, and looking around. “Ah well, I’ll help out, once again. I know a way that will work. It’s not going to make a lot of sense to you, but oh well, you’ve been living with dinosaurs for a while so maybe this won’t seem so strange after all.”

“We trust you, sir,” said Mr. Kelly, nodding his head in earnest. “What do we need to do?”

The old man gazed down the street at the crowds gathering there. “Tell your people to get a few supplies from their homes, blankets, some food and water, whatever they can grab quickly. Then meet me over there, at the foot of the Big Hill.”

Instructions were communicated through Mr. Ray and Mr. Kelly, with the help of Herbert and Tom, and people scattered in a frenzy of activity. They went into houses and came out with arms full, children rounded up and enlisted in carrying things. Betsy, Tacy and Tib watched from their spot near the bench and the TARDIS.

Tacy nudged Betsy. “This was what we saw when we went back to our homes after we escaped the T. rex. It looked like things had been gathered up so quickly.”

Betsy nodded. That had been strange to see.

Soon the crowd had made its way to the foot of the Big Hill. Mr. Meecham was standing there facing the hill, his arms outstretched a look of wild concentration on his face. His cape had drifted forward from his back and now covered his arms. “What is he doing?” whispered Tib. He looked to be muttering words beneath his breath.

The crowds watched silently for a minute, looking from one to another with puzzled looks on their faces. Then Mr. Meecham tossed back his head and gave a loud shout. The crowd murmured, then questioning voices grew louder as they watched.

With a roar of screeching and scraping noises, a piece of the Hill began to move. Dirt clods fell as a grassy rounded part opened outward towards them, like a door in their own Big Hill! This door was taller than Mr. Meecham and wide enough that his carriage and horses could have passed through. It was rounded like a cave opening and dark like one too. Betsy and Tacy and Tib gasped along with the rest of the people. A doorway IN the Big Hill? Their hill?

Mr. Ray was standing by Mr. Meecham, and his eyes were agog. He seemed to sputter as he tried to find words. "My good man, what is this? What IS this?"

Mr. Meecham looked a little fatigued from his exertions. He wiped his brow a moment and smirked at Mr. Ray. "You people! You people have never bothered to get to know me, so I'm sure it is coming as a shock that I'm not the old mild-mannered rich man you've taken me to be. I'm a learned wizard, and I've never gotten to use my talents as much as I would've liked to. For today, I give you this temporary solution to your troubles. The Big Hill is hollow and will make an excellent hiding place from that evil dinosaur who is on his way right now. Hide yourself inside your own beloved Hill. You will be safe here!"

After a few moments of hesitation, a distant roar was heard that got the crowd moving forward. Mr. Ray and Mr. Kelly stood near the door, guiding the people forward. Betsy could tell they were trying to be reassuring and brave, nodding at their family and neighbors as they quickly entered the hideaway. Mr. Meecham stood off to one side, looking off in a different direction, as if he wasn't apart of anything going on. Betsy glanced over at the Doctor, who was standing near Mr. Meecham. She was looking at him with a studious look of concentration, and then began holding out her golden screw driver and waving it slowly up and down in front of him.

The girls saw Betsy's mother and Tacy's mother stop in front of Mr. Ray and Mr. Kelly. "Have you seen Betsy and Tacy?" Mrs. Ray asked, frantically.

"None of our children have seen them!" said Mrs. Kelly,

The fathers both shuddered. They'd been so busy and worried about the problem, they hadn't realized their daughters were missing. "Wait," said Mr. Kelly, going into the

Hill. He came back out in a minute with Herbert and Tom. “Were Betsy and Tacy downtown with you when the T. rex got loose?”

The boys looked at each other and gulped. “Yes, sir. They got to be in the first group to go in and see it. They had already gotten out when the T. rex escaped. We saw them running away, but then we lost track of them.”

“Don’t you have any idea where they are?” asked Mr. Ray.

Tom frowned. “Sorry ma’am, no we don’t. But they are smart. I’ll bet they got someplace safe.”

The adults all looked at each other, faces anxious, unsure. Mr. Ray looked around for any signs of them. “I hate this,” said Mr. Ray. “I would go look for them, but I don’t think we can chance it right now. They could be anywhere. Once we get out of the Hill in a few days, I promise I’ll find them.” He grabbed Mrs. Ray’s hand. “I promise, Jules.”

They all had tears in their eyes, which made Betsy and Tacy feel terrible. They never saw parents cry, and to think they were making their parents so upset was hard.

Tacy had tears in her eyes now too, and she ran forward. “Mama! Papa! It’s okay! I’m fine!” she shouted, grabbing onto the sleeves of each of her parents.

But it was useless. None of the adults turned to look at her. They nodded their heads and turned away, and Tacy just stood there crying.

Betsy, Tib and the Doctor came forward. Betsy and Tib each took a side and hugged her. The Doctor patted her head soothingly. “Remember, darling, they can’t see or hear you. I’m sorry that was so hard to watch. Ah, the grief that sometimes comes from love. All will be well, child.”

They all walked back to watch the rest of the proceedings.

The last of the people had gone into the Big Hill, which was still dark to the girls as they tried to look in. Mr. Ray and Mr. Kelly turned to Mr. Meecham with questioning eyes. "What happens next, sir?" asked Mr. Ray.

Mr. Meecham frowned. "Obviously, you will go inside after them and I will shut the doorway."

The men waited a minute. That wasn't a good enough answer. "And then what, Mr. Meecham?" asked Mr. Kelly, eyes concerned.

The old man sighed. "You will be safe from that menacing dinosaur. I've set the doorway to magically open again in three days. The danger should have passed by then. Of course, there are no guarantees, but your chances will be good."

He looked at the men with their troubled and tired faces. He sighed again, then reached underneath his cape. "Here, it's dark in there. This should help." He held out a lantern with a blazing light.

The men nodded their heads and each one grabbed his hand in turn. "Thank you, Mr. Meecham. Thanks for your help," said Mr. Ray. Then he gave one last sweeping glance down the street. Betsy gulped, was he looking for her and Tacy? And then he and Mr. Kelly entered the Big Hill. Mr. Meecham held up his hands and seemed to be muttering some words. The grassy door of the Big Hill slowly creaked shut. Betsy, Tacy and Tib gasped. They couldn't see any sign that the doorway existed on the Hill. It looked the same as it ever had.

Mr. Meecham put down his arms and then shook his head. You could tell this hadn't been his favorite thing to do. And yet, he had a strange little smile on his face as he walked back to his carriage. A short driver sat in the front of the carriage (they hadn't

noticed him before) and he got out to help Mr. Meecham step up into the carriage. With a wave of the reins, the driver drove Mr. Meecham's carriage off down Hill Street.

Then it was quiet. There was nobody else around.

Tib was the first to move. She walked up to the Hill where the doorway had been. "So they're all in there?" She pointed.

The Doctor stepped up to where the doorway had been in the Big Hill and held her Sonic Screwdriver out, pointing at it, then moved her arm up and down. "Yes," she nodded. "Everyone is in the Hill."

"Mr. Meecham said three days," cried Tacy. "But it's been weeks now! They must be scared and hungry."

Betsy ran up and patted the side of the Hill. "Could they hear us? I mean, if we went back to the current day?"

The Doctor scrutinized her screwdriver. "I'm afraid not. They are all fine, but it appears they are in a state of suspended animation. Whatever spell this Meecham has cast made them sleep, so they aren't aware that any time has passed."

"Why would he do that?" asked Betsy. "Why would he say three days and then just leave them here? Why would he help in the first place then?"

"More mysteries for us to solve," said the Doctor with a shrug.

The girls stood a few moments, deep in thought. They needed to figure this out and save their families. They pored over all the details they knew so far in their minds.

"I think we need to go back to the present and visit Mr. Meecham," said Tib with a firm nod. "We know where he lives. Remember when we visited it a few years ago, trying to get votes to be a queen?"

“Can’t forget that!” said Tacy. “That’s a good idea, Tib. We can talk to him and get him to open the Hill. Maybe he just forgot.”

“But he said to our fathers that it would open automatically in three days,” Betsy chimed in. “So either he lied or something went wrong.”

Tacy turned to the Doctor. “Can we get back to the present? That day when we met you?”

“Excellent plan!” The Doctor beamed at them. “I would be happy to. Into the TARDIS!”

The girls were getting used to this time-traveling police box. They got in and in no time they were back to the present, the TARDIS having handily landed right in Little Syria, in front of the Meecham mansion. The girls remembered the first time they saw it a few years before, surprised at how run-down and un-cared-for the home and yard of this prosperous man had been. Now, however, it looked like a totally different place. The house looked like it had gone from slouching in its old age to standing straight up, gleaming white and proud. The long row of tall evergreens leading up to the house had been removed, and there were now pillars with lions on them and the steps were black and white marble. The lawn was a sheet of mown green instead of the patchy scrabble it had been last time. There was still a tall iron fence with spikes around it all.

“Hmm, this looks different,” said Tib.

“Maybe Mr. Meecham used his magic,” said Betsy.

“I hope that mean dog isn’t still here.” Tacy’s face looked anxious. “Can you come with us, Doctor?”

The Doctor gave a gentle smile. “I think you girls can handle this. You’re doing brilliantly so far. I’ll be here in case you need me.”

Betsy, Tacy and Tib looked at each other, questions in their eyes. They didn't exactly know how this would go. Tib shrugged and then stepped up to the gate and lifted the latch. She boldly walked up the marble sidewalk to the front door. Betsy and Tacy followed, not quite so boldly but knowing that they needed to do this. "Look at all the things we've already done!" thought Betsy to herself.

Tib pounded the golden lion-faced door knocker several times. They waited, and then a young woman in a white cap answered the door. When they asked for Mr. Meecham, she looked surprised, but said she would let him know. The door closed and the girls were left to wait again.

Tib tapped her foot with her arms crossed, pursing her lips. She didn't look afraid at all, which helped Betsy and Tacy. Confronting someone wasn't easy, but this was important.

At last, the door opened and there was Mr. Meecham, looking as powerful, important and unapproachable as he always did. He frowned and slowly scrutinized them. "Yes?" he said in such a way that they knew it meant, "why are you bothering me?"

Tib looked up at the tall man. "Mr. Meecham, I am Tib, and this is Tacy and Betsy. We know that you helped hide our neighborhood in the Big Hill a few weeks ago when the T. rex was rampaging."

He looked scornful, scrunching up his face. "How do you know that?"

Betsy stepped up. "You're not the only one to use a bit of magic."

Tacy was next. "You told them that the door in the Hill would open in three days, but it's been many weeks now and they're still in there! Won't you please let them out?" she pleaded.

Mr. Meecham smirked. “No, I don’t think so. I’m not ready for that yet.”

“What do you mean?” asked Betsy.

“This town,” he shook his head. “This town has spurned me since the day I arrived from the East, years ago. I bought all this land to help develop Deep Valley, and had high hopes for building this area up, with homes and businesses. I had expected it to thrive. Instead, no one would come to this part of town, and no one wanted to live here. ‘It’s too far from downtown,’ they all whined. ‘Too far away from the other parts of town.’ I grew so tired of hearing that. In the end, all I could do was offer property to the Syrians coming to Deep Valley. They were the only ones who would live here. I lost a lot of money because of this town’s stupid reasons. Instead of thriving, this area is more about surviving.” His voice was gruff with anger.

The girls looked at each other. They’d known most of this story already. They hadn’t known Mr. Meecham was so angry and resentful; they’d always just seen him as a grouchy old man.

Tib cleared her throat and stepped closer to him on her tiptoes. She had a sweet look on her face. “Sir, don’t you remember us? A few years ago we visited Little Syria and you drove up in your carriage. I asked you to sign a paper to vote for me as queen of summer. Don’t you remember?” She sounded so polite and still looked so pretty, despite all their tired travels. She smiled her most charming smile at him.

When they were 10 and they had approached Mr. Meecham, he had looked grouchy but then had softened and smiled at them. He’d signed the paper to vote for Tib.

But today his face stayed hardened and stony. “Those people can stay in the Hill for a while. They can pay for how they’ve treated me. I like them being absent right now.”

Betsy remembered her father talking about Mr. Meecham, especially since Mr. Ray was a businessman in Deep Valley, running his shoe store. He and other business owners and other townspeople had repeatedly tried to reach out to the old man, invited him to discussions and planning meetings, and just tried to be friendly to him. Mr. Meecham had been standoffish, aloof, disdainful. It was clear that this story Mr. Meecham was telling them wasn’t entirely correct. She felt a burst of indignation surge through her.

“That’s not right!” she shouted. “You can’t just tell them you’re saving them and then keep them locked up in the Hill like some jail. That’s evil!”

Tacy stepped up too. “Those people did nothing to hurt you! That’s not fair, and it’s certainly not nice!”

Mr. Meecham smirked, his eyes like dark lasers. “Go away little girls. I don’t care what you think. This is not my concern!”

The girls’ hearts were beating fast, staring up at this white-bearded face, listening to his words of resentment. Then they heard the gate clang open behind them.

“Oh!” a girl’s voice growled loudly. “I cannot believe what I’m hearing. Mr. Meecham, you-you-you!” The voice had a thick, sing-songy accent, and seemed breathless from running fast.

They all turned and looked, their eyes wide with surprise. It was a face they knew well from their past, their Syrian friend Naifi! Her long black braids swung as she ran

towards them. She wore Western clothing like theirs, a dress and stockings, but still looked exotic with her dark almond eyes, brown skin and gold earrings.

“Naifi!” All three girls cried out. Their faces burst with smiles. They wanted to greet her properly, but they could tell this was not the moment. There was business at hand. And Naifi was on a mission.

She marched purposefully up the marble steps. “Mr. Meecham, sir!” she scolded. “I cannot believe what I am hearing! Have you really used your powers to trap the good people of Deep Valley? In the Hill? Shame on you!”

The girls looked at each other, impressed. Not only was Naifi telling him off so forcefully, but she had learned English well in the last few years.

Mr. Meecham gave a little bow. “Good afternoon, Emeera. So glad you could join us.” His voice had a mocking tone.

“These are my good friends,” she continued, still sounding fierce. She now turned to smile at each of them, her dimple showing. “I would burn my house for them. Our Deep Valley is full of good people. You would know that if you would give something, not resent what you cannot take.”

He stared at her, stone-faced.

Betsy, Tacy and Tib’s eyes were big with amazement. Their Naifi was so strong and sure! She spoke with power, like they thought a real queen might do. She was, after all, a Syrian emeera, as they’d learned a few years ago. When they’d met her, she’d been being bullied by mean boys in town. They’d helped her then. Now she was fiercely standing up to a bully.

Naifi’s fists had been balled up. Now she sighed, softening a little. “People help each other. It makes the world better. They do not lock them in hills.”

Tacy leaned in, her eyes beseeching. "Use your magic for good, Mr. Meecham. People will be so grateful. And then maybe there can be a new beginning with you and Deep Valley."

They all looked at him, sensing that silence would be best now. Mr. Meecham stood like a statue, his arms crossed, staring them down. Long moments passed, and everyone waited. None of these girls were willing to give in.

At long last, the old man's shoulders slumped and he looked downward. "I... I don't know. You've taken all the joy out of resentment. I'll let them out, even if it's just to get rid of you four."

Betsy sensed that he needed to hang onto his gruff exterior, to save face. He probably wants to connect with people in town and doesn't know how. Maybe it's hard when you're the richest man, she thought.

"Thank you, Mr. Meecham!" Betsy said, running forward to hug him. "There are so many better things than resentment!"

He looked taken aback by the hug. Each of them came forward to do the same after Betsy, and his stony face melted a bit. He seemed rather bewildered by it all. He backed up into his house, excusing himself and saying that he'd get his livery man to prepare the carriage. Betsy, Tacy and Tib would go over and watch as he opened the Hill.

The girls were now free to descend on Naifi with hugs and kisses.

"I can't believe it!" cried Betsy.

"You sure surprised us," said Tib.

"Thank you for your help!" said Tacy.

Naifi couldn't stop smiling. "That Mr. Meecham is difficult to deal with. I've learned a lot from watching my father talk to him. And my friends, I am so happy to see you!"

There was no time now for a longer catch-up with Naifi. They all promised to do that soon, come back to Little Syria and talk with her. Now they must go to the Big Hill with Mr. Meecham. They waved goodbye and gave thank yous to their Syrian emeera friend, then ran to check in with the Doctor, who said she'd heard it all.

"We're going to the Hill in Mr. Meecham's carriage," said Tacy.

"Yes, we need to make sure will do as he said," explained Tib.

"All righty, my dears. I will meet you over there, me and the TARDIS." The Doctor had a big smile. "I'm so proud of you girls. It wasn't easy to stand up to someone like him."

Betsy thought about that for a minute. "It became easier when we knew we were fighting to save our families. Then it wouldn't have mattered if he was a monster. We might be afraid, but we would fight him anyway."

"That's courage," said the Doctor. "You felt the fear and did it anyway. You had the courage of your convictions."

"Isn't it funny?" Tib pointed out. "One time we fought for Naifi when she was being bullied. We jumped right in because we knew this wasn't right. And this time, Naifi jumped in to help us fight a bully."

"Wow, that's right," said Tacy.

Mr. Meecham's carriage was pulling up now, so the girls gave a quick wave and got in. The driver stepped down to help them up, which made them feel a little more elegant, despite their disheveled appearance from all their travels. Tib sat next to Mr.

Meecham, who had brought along his newspaper and was reading it, which helped alleviate some of the awkwardness of the situation. The girls just looked each other with shining eyes, excited to be near the end of this mystery.

Chapter 14: Deep Valley Mystery, Solved

It didn't take long to get back over to their neighborhood. When the carriage stopped, the girls hopped down, not waiting for the driver. Mr. Meecham waited and then got down slowly. Then they all approached the spot where the doorway had been. There was no sign of any of it, and it was so hard for the girls to believe that people were there, inside the hill they had climbed countless times in their lives.

Mr. Meecham stood facing the Big Hill, just standing and looking. The girls noticed he was wearing his cape again. After several moments, he turned to look at them, frowning.

"The truth is," he said, "I'm sorry. It wasn't right, what I did. I have been so angry for so long. But I also felt hurt. I wanted things to be different, but I didn't know how to make that happen. I blamed these people, and that only made things worse. You're right about starting again. I can try."

The girls beamed at him. "Thank you, sir," said Betsy. "We have been on a whole long journey ourselves and have learned a lot. I think that if you want it to be different, then you can make that happen. If you will open up to other people, I'll bet they'll open up to you to."

He pursed his lips and nodded his head. "Well, let's get this Hill opened up. I know you are eager to see your people."

He held out his arms and murmured words, falling into a state of deep concentration. After a few minutes, he tossed back his head and yelled a loud "HA!" The air around them tingled. The girls watched as the tall rounded opening in the hill appeared, the front of the Big Hill opening like a door.

Everything was quiet for a minute. The girls held their breath, waiting. Mr. Meecham slumped, his head down and his shoulders sinking down, as if this had exhausted him. Soon he stood back up erect and then stepped towards the opening. He stuck in his head and called out, "Good day, people of Deep Valley! It's safe to come out now!"

There were sounds of movement within, and the lantern that had been given to the fathers must've gotten turned on, since the opening no longer looked pitch black. The first people started coming out, blinking and looking half-asleep still. They walked out stiffly, and Mr. Meecham stood back out of the way to let them file out. Betsy and Tacy and Tib smiled, nodded and waved to people, their friends and neighbors and community members. Crowds of people stood around talking as still more people came out. At last, towards the end, Betsy and Tacy's families came out.

Betsy and Tacy ran right up into the arms of their parents, with their sisters and brothers gathering around closely.

"Oh, my girls!" exclaimed Mrs. Kelly. "We were so worried about you, with that T. rex on the loose!"

"Where have you been?" asked Mrs. Ray, her face full of concern and relief.

"Yes," said Mr. Ray. "It's been three whole days. Sure felt like the longest sleep of my life though. Where have you been?"

Betsy and Tacy looked at each other, eyes wide. "It's kind of a long story," said Betsy.

"Much longer than you'll believe," added Tacy.

Mr. Kelly gasped, then gave a little shout. "Is that.... Tib over there? From Milwaukee?"

They all turned to look. “Aaaaand... a police box? Like they have in London?” asked Mrs. Ray.

Betsy and Tacy motioned for Tib to join them. “We can explain everything,” said Betsy. “But not now. We have plenty of time, now that everyone’s safe. And yes, Tib is part of the story.”

Tib pranced over to the families and smiled brightly at them. “Hullo, Mr. and Mrs. Ray, Mr. and Mrs. Kelly. It’s me. Flew here on a pterodactyl with Betsy and Tacy. Did they tell you that part yet?”

The adults all looked nonplussed, their eyes quizzical. “Well, I think later is a fine plan,” said Mr. Ray. “It’s time to go home and put the coffee pot on. I sure am hungry. Do you think we have any onions at home, Jules? And bread?”

“We’ll go see, dear,” said Mrs. Ray.

The crowds started dissipating then, and the Ray and Kelly families headed towards their homes. Betsy, Tacy and Tib stood by the Big Hill, watching it all, a feeling of deep satisfaction in solving this mystery. When the street was all quiet at last, the girls turned towards the TARDIS. The Doctor was leaning right up against it with her arms crossed, a smile on her face that made her look like a purring cat.

The girls ran over to her. “Doctor!

The Doctor held open her arms and they descended on her with hugs. She squeezed tight. “Oh, this is all so wonderful! I just love it when my job helps bring about such happy results. But you, my scruffy young ladies,” she looked each of them in the eyes, “it was all YOU on this mission. While you were with Mr. Meecham, the TARDIS showed me scenes from your epic saga before I arrived on the scene. Astounding really, how you two” she nodded at Betsy and Tacy, “started off on foot to Milwaukee on your

own, and then all the people you met along the way. That dear boy Anker and his flying reptiles, what a find! Then off to Tib's and the great escape, very tricky. And more flying reptiles... I just loved seeing you girls doing that. You did whatever it took, even when it scared your stockings off. Well done, my dears, well done!"

The girls beamed at her. It was easy to forget all they'd been through, since they'd had to just go on and face the next challenge. But gee, thought Betsy, they really had done a lot! The writer in her also couldn't help thinking of all the stories she could write because of these experiences.

"We're so glad that you showed up to help us too," said Tacy. "I loved riding in the TARDIS."

"And seeing space!" said Tib.

"And time traveling!" said Betsy. "What will you do next?"

The Doctor chuckled. "Well, you aren't getting rid of me quite yet. I have one more little thing for you. Well," she paused, finger on her chin. "Actually, it's pretty big. It's about this whole dinosaur thing. It's turning out to be somewhat of a mess in your world. Having them here in the 20th century is a fluke, way outside the natural order of things. They don't fit in, and as you well know, they have the ability to cause big problems for the good citizens of your country."

Tacy nodded. "I've never really gotten used to seeing dinosaurs around Deep Valley. Even after five years, they still surprise me."

"They sure are everywhere," said Tib. "My dad ended up taking on a job with Dino Control Patrol because they needed to be managed."

“This is why I wanted to talk to you girls about this. You did such a smash-up job in helping your own town that I know you’ll be the right ones to help clear up all this dinosaur mess,” said the Doctor.

“We can fix this?” asked Betsy. “It just seemed like this is the way things are now, since those dinosaurs were discovered in the ice in the Arctic.”

“Wellll,” sighed the Doctor. “I do wish I had time to explain the realities of Time to you, my dears. But let’s just say for starters that it isn’t what most people think. Time isn’t just a straight line from here to there. There are all these branches,” she grew emphatic, starting to draw with her finger rapidly in the air, “shooting off in multiple directions at once, making for infinite possibilities...” her voice had grown louder with each word, and now she paused and looked down at the confused faces. She sighed again.

“You’ll just have to trust me on this. This current reality with dinosaurs is not the only possibility. And I’ve thought of how we can get things back on track, to a 20th century without T. rexes and triceratops and apatosauri lumbering around everywhere in a world where they no longer fit in.”

“Sure, let’s do it,” said Tib, always ready and willing to jump on a plan.

“What do we have to do?” asked Betsy. “I mean, this doesn’t seem like something we can do anything about. You’re the Doctor with your TARDIS and your sonic screwdriver.”

The Doctor bonked her own forehead with her fist. “Ah, if we only had more time, then I could explain all this. And I know that’s a rather ironic thing for a Time Lord to say.” She saw their eyebrows raise up and pursed her lips. “Scratch that. A time-traveling Doctor. Anyway, yes, I can help facilitate the plan of returning to a reality

without dinosaurs, but I need human intention in order to make it happen. As much as I look human to you girls, I'm actually not. I will have to come back and explain all to you some later day!" She gave them all a smile and a wink.

Betsy shook her head. "Well, okay. We don't have to know the whole explanation right now, though I do hope you'll come back and tell us sometime! We trust you. We are willing to try if it can make things better."

Tacy nodded. "You've helped us so much already. We trust you!"

"Wonderful!" the Doctor exclaimed. "Here's our plan, then. It takes some magic to leap to another timeline, and one of the great forces of magic is the Imagination. In poking around at your pasts, I know that you girls are masters of Imagination, all of you, and especially you, my little writer." The Doctor nodded at her.

Betsy swallowed hard, feeling a bit of fear and pride at the same time.

"The TARDIS can help facilitate the changes we want to see by following a script created by human intention and Imagination. So I need Betsy to use the imaginations of all of you to write me a script. A story, a possibility, a description of dinosaurs all over the country starting a slow, gradual migration back to the Arctic."

"Oh!" said Betsy, excitedly. "They'll all go back to the North Pole and freeze in their sleep again, and be buried in snow and ice!"

"They can dream about the past, wandering the Earth before people," said Tacy.

"They probably can't dream if they're frozen," Tib pointed out. Betsy and Tacy each poked her gently in the ribs, just to tease.

"We don't know that," said Tacy. "We've never been frozen."

"Do you think you can do this?" asked the Doctor, her eyes brightly amused by the three girls.

“Oh yes!” said Betsy. “Just give me a pencil!” Ideas were already popping in her head.

The Doctor came up with pencils and paper, and brought the girls into the TARDIS. A few levers were pushed and a writing desk rose up from the floor, with cushioned seats for Tacy and Tib on each side. For the next hour, the Doctor watched the girls at work, fascinated by the way they all three consulted together. Betsy scribbled and scratched out as they hashed out details and ideas. Betsy made a story of it, a fine use of adjectives and description, told from the point of view of one of the triceratops herself who had lived through the whole thing, never feeling right living in the modern times, and the internal pull to migrate back to the Arctic. It was all as beautifully written as Betsy could make it, on short notice.

When the girls were satisfied with their work, Betsy read it all out loud for the Doctor to hear, and she applauded enthusiastically at the end.

“It’s perfect! I knew I could count on you girls to do the job right. I think it will work. Let’s just see...” she took the written pages from Betsy and fed them into a slot in the TARDIS’ control panel. Lights blinked and something made a series of beeping noises, then stopped. The Doctor peered down at a screen. “Yes, that will do nicely. That should do the trick. Time will tell!”

They heard a knock on the door of the TARDIS then.

They all startled a moment. “Maybe it’s your families, wondering where you’ve gone off to again?” said the Doctor.

“Yeah, they might be wondering,” said Tacy.

Tib ran over to the door and opened. “Oh!” she gasped. “Look who it is!”

And there were the unexpected guests: Mr. Muller and Anker, whose eyes were just as big as Betsy, Tacy and Tib's. "We found you!" cried Anker.

The girls went outside and there were hugs and smiles all around. Tib did a happy little dance. "What are you doing here? Both of you?"

Mr. Muller motioned to Anker to go ahead. "After you girls escaped, I had to calm down the grownups and do more explaining," Anker told them. "They were all very worried, but I knew that you three could handle it all just fine. In the end, it was decided that Mr. Muller and I would come by train to Deep Valley, so that he could make sure you girls had arrived safely, and to make sure the town was okay. Of course I needed a way to get back to my pterodactyls, get them home to La Crosse. So, here we are!"

Mr. Muller gave a smile to the Doctor. "I don't believe we've met, ma'am. I'm Frederick Muller, Tib's father." He held out his hand and she enthusiastically shook it.

"I'm the Doctor, Mr. Muller, and I'm sure Tib will fill you in on our adventures. I was just here to help."

He stepped towards the TARDIS. "May I ask, what is this police box doing here, on Hill Street?"

The Doctor smiled. "Oh, it's mine, and I'll be leaving shortly and taking it with me."

He peered inside the open door of the TARDIS, and then stepped back to look at the outside. His brows furrowed as he repeated his motions two more times, looking at inside, then stepping back to look at the outside. "This... isn't possible. It doesn't make sense!"

They all laughed. The girls had gotten so used to the new and strange magic of the Doctor that they didn't even think about it now. "Oh, this must seem very strange to an architect!" said Betsy.

"We can talk about it later, Papa," said Tib. "Well, of course we don't really know how it all works."

"You know more than you think, my dears," said the Doctor.

Anker had been hanging back. Now he stepped forward. "I think it's all really amazing. I can go along with magic. Heck, I'm trying to fly pterodactyls for a business, which seems pretty magical too."

Betsy, Tacy and Tib all froze for a moment as the new reality dawned on them. "Oh no!" cried Tacy. "If all the dinosaurs migrate to the Arctic and go away again, then Anker won't have any pterodactyls to fly!"

"Any my father won't have his job with Dino Control Patrol anymore!" cried Tib.

Mr. Muller and Anker were completely befuddled by this and the girls looked so upset at this part of the plan that they hadn't considered before.

"Oh dear," said the Doctor. "Don't worry, all will be well. But I think we'd better move up our explanations for these fellows. I'll start, and you girls jump in as needed."

They all went inside the TARDIS, where Mr. Muller and Anker exclaimed at all the colorful futuristic gadgetry, not to mention when the Doctor made seating appear for all of them by pulling a few levers.

The next long while was filled with storytelling and explanations of all that had happened since the trio had arrived in Deep Valley, what they'd seen, how the Doctor had come along to help. They carried through all the way to just now, when Betsy, Tacy

and Tib wrote the story that would change the timeline, and how the dinosaurs would no longer exist in the present.

Anker and Mr. Muller listened with mouths agape, not knowing quite how to take it all in.

“I know this will all be a big change again for everyone, getting back to an America where dinosaurs are not a part of life except in history books or museums. But I really think it is for the best,” soothed the Doctor.

“I’m sorry it will mean you don’t have a job anymore, Mr. Muller,” said Betsy.

Mr. Muller rubbed his forehead, taking it all in. Then he gave a shrug. “Well, truth be told, I have been wanting to get back to being an architect. Dino Control Patrol was an interesting job for a while, and it has been nice seeing our relatives in Milwaukee, hasn’t it, Tib? But I’ve been missing the work I used to do designing buildings.”

“Does this mean we might move back to Deep Valley?” asked Tib excitedly.

“We’ll see, we’ll see,” said Mr. Muller, looking a bit dazed.

Betsy, Tacy and Tib jumped up and down, squealing at the idea. But they stopped after a moment, noticing Anker’s confused face.

“Oh, you’ve worked so hard on your pterodactyl flying business, Anker!” cried Tacy.

“We don’t want to take that away from you. It’s such a great idea,” said Betsy, frowning at the thought.

Anker hung his head, nodding as he took in their comments. “I’ll really miss it,” he said, the dejection heavy in his voice. “I’m really fond of my girls.”

The Doctor patted him on the shoulder. “My dear boy,” she said. “Your pterodactyl flying business was genius, and you deserve a medal for both the idea and your

implementation of your plan. Think of how you helped out Betsy, Tacy and Tib so much, all because of your business idea. I know you will be sad to see your beloved reptiles go. All is not lost for your idea of a flying business. You've heard of the Wright Brothers? The world of aeroplanes and flying machines is just taking off -- don't mind the pun! There is still more flying in your future, and you can get in on the action right away. You and your friend Todo can apply what you've learned to getting in on the new business of flying 'planes.' Trust me, it will be very big in the future."

Anker had slowly raised his head as she talked. The Doctor was such a flashy character and it was mesmerizing to hear her talk. The idea of the Wright Brothers and flying machines brought a hint of sparkle to his eyes.

"Wow, really?" he said. "I will certainly give that some thought. Oh, but hey, my pterodactyls are still here, right? I would like to see them again, and I should probably feed and care for them."

It was time for the party to break up. Betsy, Tacy and Tib said they would take Anker to the shed by the river where they'd left Fritzzy, Mitzy and Ditzzy. Betsy told Mr. Muller that he and Tib could stay with her family, and he indicated that he and Tib could then take the train back to Milwaukee the next day.

"I need to fly my pterodactyls again," said Anker. "I'll fly them back to La Crosse and explain everything to Todo, before all the dinosaurs leave."

"Oh, you have a few weeks for the migration to begin," assured the Doctor. The change will be somewhat gradual. Not all dinosaurs will leave at the same time. It will happen in stages, as the girls wrote."

"That will make it easier," said Tib.

And now, they all paused. It was done. They'd solved the mystery and restored the people to Deep Valley. They'd written a new future, free of dinosaurs. Betsy and Tacy looked at each other and sighed. Was it really over?

"Remember when we stood here so many weeks ago, at the start of our journey?" Betsy said to Tacy.

"We had heavy backpacks and water, and we just started walking," said Tacy. "It seems like a long time ago."

Betsy nodded, remembering those first few days, walking so far, and then all the people they'd met along the way. "I learned so much from everything we did," said Betsy. "We were seeing the Great World, even if we didn't go that far. It felt like a whole new world."

Tib bounced on her toes. "I'm really glad you thought to come and find me!" she said. "I was so surprised. You thought Papa could help you, but it ended up being us. And Anker. And you!" she turned and beamed at the Doctor.

"Yes, you!" said Tacy. "You sure helped us out a lot, Doctor."

"We couldn't have done it without you," said Betsy.

"Well," said the Doctor. "It may seem that way to you, but I know you three are so inquisitive and intelligent, you would have figured it out. I speeded things up a bit. And I just couldn't resist joining in the fun. It's been a blast!" Her eyes twinkled at them.

And then she grew serious. She took each of their faces in her hands, one at a time. She gazed into their eyes, first Betsy, then Tacy, then Tib. "I am so very proud of you all. You are intrepid heroes, girls full of wonder, and utterly delightful companions. I wish I could take you with me."

“Take us, take us, take us!” yelled Tib. The girls laughed, remembering how they had once tried to hypnotize Winona with those word, to get her to take them to see “Uncle Tom’s Cabin” at the Opera House.

“Do you really have to say goodbye?” asked Tacy, looking very sad.

“Oh my dears, I’ve grown quite fond of you too. Who knows, I may be back someday to take you on another ride with me. Or maybe you,” she smiled and pointed to Anker.

“YES!” exclaimed Anker. “I’d go in a minute!”

“But for now, let’s say our ‘adieu’ and let you all get on with your future. You’ve been splendid companions. I will miss you dearly, but all will be well.” The Doctor looked teary-eyed, as were the girls, but she kept her tone bright and her face brave.

She shook hands with Mr. Muller, then gave a hug to Anker. She opened her arms to Tib and rubbed her curly yellow hair. She turned to Tacy for a hug, tweaked her nose and whispered to her about her bravery.

Then she gave a big smile to Betsy and wrapped her arms around her. “You, my dear, must keep on writing, you hear me?” she whispered in her ear. “You are a storyteller, and you have no idea how many people you will affect with your writing. Honestly -- I have seen the future, and there are girls and women whose lives will change because of your stories, women who will connect... ah, I can’t say any more than that. But your words will be as much of a time machine as my TARDIS.”

Betsy looked at the Doctor with big eyes. “Really?” she whispered back. “I promise. I’ll keep writing. I love it so much anyway.”

The Doctor stepped back then, taking a deep breath and waving to them all as she stepped inside the TARDIS. Betsy, Tacy and Tib held hands, beaming brightly at the

same time as tears brimmed at their eyes. It had been a wild adventure. They'd been used to having adventures ever since they met, but all those were a lot smaller in comparison. They watched as the TARDIS shimmered, heard the beeping noises that they knew meant the Doctor was leaving, and then in a moment, it was gone. The Deep Valley night was suddenly quiet.

"I suppose we'll be having big adventures like this all the time now," said Tib, who seemed to be having a second wind now that the excitement was over.

"Um, I think I need a lot of resting first, after this one," said Betsy.

"I'm so tired!" said Tacy.

"I know the perfect place to rest!" said Tib. She pirouetted and then waved her hand down the road.

"Our bench!" cried Tacy. "I'd forgotten about it."

"Yes, let's sit on our bench. And have a picnic tomorrow before you leave," said Betsy. The girls walked to the bench and sat down, looking down Hill Street.

Tacy and Betsy nodded. The girls slumped against each other, leaning their heads on one another's shoulders. Everything felt perfect and right in the world.

"I've missed this," said Tib. "I hope wherever we adventure, we come back here."

"We will," said Betsy, smiling contentedly, feeling blissful about the words the Doctor had whispered to her.

She looked up at the Big Hill and the sky above it. We will have more adventures, and I will write about them, she thought.

The End (until next time)