Moving Blues

By Kelly Musselman

Cate walked slowly through the empty house one more time. “Good-bye, kitchen,” she whispered. A shiny spot on the scuffed linoleum stood out where the refrigerator had been until yesterday afternoon.

Dark squares stood out on the living room walls where family pictures had hung. Cate rubbed her sneaker over a pink stain in the carpet. That was where she’d spilled a glass of grape juice when she was seven. The stain never did come out, and her mother ended up moving the furniture around to hide it.

Cate’s throat tightened when she passed the door to the laundry room. Short lines were pencilled across the door frame, with tiny numbers written next to them. Cate ran a finger over the numbers as she read them out loud.

“Age two, thirty-four inches. Age three, thirty-eight inches. Age four, forty inches. Age five, forty-four inches.”

“Stand up straight, now,” her dad would say as she stood against the wall. Then he’d place the ruler on her head and mark the frame with his pencil. “No fair stretching!” he’d say with a laugh.

Cate sighed. Whoever bought the house would just paint over the numbers. All the growing up she’d done here wouldn’t mean anything to them.

“Cate! We’re almost ready to leave. Do you have everything?”

Cate jumped, startled. “Um, yes, I guess so, Dad. I just wanted to see my room one more time before we go.”

“All right, but hurry up.”

Cate took the stairs two at a time. How many times had she run up and down these stairs, she wondered.

Second room on the left. Cate tiptoed up to the door and pushed it open. How lifeless it looked! Thumbtack holes dotted the pale yellow walls from the dozens of posters she’d hung up over the years.

She gazed out the window at the yard below. There was her jungle gym, bare patches under the swings where she’d dragged her feet a thousand times. Her old sandbox, which her mother had turned into an herb garden. Her favorite tree to climb and read books in. How many hours had she spent daydreaming there?

Cate pressed her cheek against the window, her breath fogging the glass. Well, it was no use daydreaming now, she thought, blinking back tears. They were moving, and there was nothing she could do about it. The only thing she was sure about was that she didn’t like it.

“So, what do you think?” Mom asked.

“It’s OK.” Cate shrugged.

“OK? Just OK? Why, I think it’s the nicest one we’ve looked at.”

“Not as nice as our old house,” Cate mumbled under her breath.
Mom pulled her into a hug. "Cate, I know you miss our old house, but we can't go back to it. Dad's job is here now."

Cate wriggled out of her mother's grasp. She stood by the fireplace and stared into the cold ashes.

"Why don't you take a look outside while I talk with the real-estate agent?" Mom suggested.

Cate sighed and trudged out the front door, banging it noisily behind her. The yard was big, with lots of old oak trees that stretched their branches up to the second-floor windows. Cate noticed that one huge gnarled oak had crooked wooden steps nailed up the side of it.

She reached for the first rung. Well, why not? she thought. This tree was obviously meant to be climbed.

She clambered up the oak. On the second-to-last step, her foot slipped as the board wobbled to the right. "Oomph," she gasped as she grabbed for the last rung. Down was a long way off, and she didn't want to fall. She pulled herself into the crook of the tree.

"Not bad," she said, looking around. The leaves were thick, but she had a clear view of the house and the property below. She could see into one of the upstairs bedrooms. From here she could probably even climb in! She leaned closer to the window.

The pane was smudged, but she could see an empty room with a dusty wooden floor and a window seat. There were two doors, one of which she figured must lead to a closet.

Cate settled back in the tree. A large knothole in the opposite limb caught her eye. Maybe it was a squirrel's home. Hanging on to a limb, Cate stood up to peek inside. There was something in the hole, but it wasn't a squirrel.

Cate reached in and pulled out a metal tube. On a piece of tape stuck to the side were written the words The Will of Ellen Cartwright. Open only if you seek adventure!

Cate carefully sat down in the crook of the oak. She screwed the top off the tube and with trembling fingers pulled out a rolled-up piece of paper.

"Dear Adventurous One: I call you that because I figure that if you have found this will, then you managed to survive the wobbly second-to-last step on this tree. (I kept meaning to fix that!)

Continued on next page

This tree was meant to be climbed.
Continued from page 33

Now I shall tell you what I, Ellen Cartwright, bequeath to you in this will.

"First, I leave you my room.
You can see it from this very spot, and yes, you can climb into it from
this tree—if the window is open, that is!

"I leave you my window seat
for reading, thinking, and bird-
watching (it's the best spot in the
house) and the big walk-in closet
for playing, hiding, and throwing
all your stuff into when your mom
tells you to clean your room.

"I leave you the banister on the
stairs for sliding down, the fire-
place for roasting marshmallows,
and a front door that bangs really
loud. I also leave you the basket-
ball hoop in the driveway the
blackberry (yummy!) bushes in the
backyard, and of course, this
wonderful old tree.

"I've lived here all my life, and
leaving this house was one of the
hardest things I've had to do. The
only things I can't leave you are
the memories that I made here; I
took them with me. But I know
that you won't need them. You'll
be busy making your own.

"So, I leave you. I am off seek-
ing new memories at my new
home.

"Ellen Cartwright, age 12."

Cate rolled up the note, slipped
it back into the metal tube, and
stuck the tube in her pocket. "The
first thing I'm going to do," she
said as she climbed down from the
oak tree, "is to fix that wobbly step."
After all, this was going to be her
tree now. Ellen had left it to her,
the Adventurous One.

Justin: "How do you like the soup
I made?"

Dustin: "It's soup-endous!"

Melissa Lindley, California

Samuel: "Would you like to
hear two short jokes and a long
one?"

Sarah: "OK."

Samuel: "Joke, joke, joo000000oke."

Sarah Schleif, Hawaii

Nancy: "It's so dark here, even
that tree is scared."

Vera: "That is impossible."

Nancy: "Look a little closer. It's
tetified."

An excited man ran frantically
down the ferry landing, leaped
across six feet of water, and
landed with a crash on the deck of
the ferry.

"Well," he gasped as he picked
himself up, "I made it!"

"What's the hurry?" asked the
deckhand. "This boat is coming
in!"

Knock, knock.
Who's there?
Canoe.
Canoe who?
Canoe help me with my home-
work?

Katherine Herrick, New Jersey

Bob: "Go look in the cage over
there. You'll see a ten-foot
snake."

Matthew: "Don't you try to kid
me. I know snakes don't have
feet."

Kaylee Laurence, Texas

Send the funniest joke or the best riddle
you've ever heard, with your name, age, and
full address (street and number, city or town,
state or province, and Zip Code), to

Highlights for Children
803 Church Street
Honesdale, PA 18431

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.