

# ALICE GUESS-RIGHT

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*To the kindergartener in the back seat, who made this story magically appear.*

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# PART 1

Alice (and Everyone Else) Discovers Her Special Talent

## Chapter 1

It all started with a school contest. Well, maybe it started before that, but Alice Westwright didn't recognize anything until that contest happened – and neither did her friends or family.

You've probably entered a contest like this one. You're shown a jar full of pennies or jelly beans or marbles, and you have to guess how many there are. And if you are like most people, you either guess the first number that comes into your head, or else you try to figure out some kind of math that will help you come up with a number that *must* be close. And whichever way you come up with a number, you aren't very close at all.

That's about how it was in Alice's classroom, when two of the older kids came into the room to announce the contest and get everyone to write down a guess of how many pennies were in the jar. Some of Alice's classmates tried to get up closer, maybe thinking they could count really fast before the jar was taken away. Alice thought that would be a stupid thing to do, and anyway, it would be cheating if someone really could count that fast. Besides, it was a really, really big jar, like the kind that you find in the grocery store to hold the extra, extra, extra jumbo size of pickles or olives. Nobody could count that fast. In fact, some of the kids in her class couldn't even *say* numbers bigger than a thousand!

Anyway, her friend Rebecca leaned over and whispered, "Alice, I'm going to write the number six hundred and fifty. How many pennies do you guess?"

Alice looked at the jar again, then back at Rebecca. "Well, I *guess* there's one thousand, one hundred and forty-four." And that's what she wrote on her slip of paper under her name: 1,144.

The big kids left the room, one carrying the jar and one carrying a box with all the slips of paper.

Oh, and what was the prize for the winner? The official prize was the jar and all the pennies in it. The unofficial prize was what people call *bragging rights*, which means that the winner could remind everyone for the next week or year what a great guesser he or she was.

That interruption caused some excitement for another five minutes after the jar disappeared, with everyone comparing answers with each other. Alice was surprised to hear guesses as low as one-hundred twenty and as high as ten thousand! But soon the teacher got everyone to stop thinking about the jar and the pennies, and the school day went on as usual.

## Chapter 2

A week later, there was an assembly, and the whole school filed into the gym to sit on the floor to listen to a wild animal expert. To be exact, it was a wild bird expert who worked at a local bird rescue center. He had brought a hawk – a real, live one! – and gave a slide show with photos of other birds that had come through the rescue center. He reminded the students that all these birds were local, meaning that the ducks, owls, and herons could be seen on a nature walk in the nearby meadows and ponds – if you were very careful and observant!

After the presentation, everyone clapped enthusiastically. Then the principal came forward and thanked the man, and told everyone to stay seated for a big announcement. Alice wondered if maybe he was going to get the man to let a student take the hawk home, so she sat very still, with her eyes on the principal, so he might pick her!

“While you’re all here, this is a good time to announce the winner of the pennies-in-the-jar contest. Remember, the lucky guesser will get to take home the jar *and* all the pennies inside!”

Alice forgot all about the hawk. She wanted to learn how close her guess was.

One of the older kids wheeled in the jar, accompanied by another older kid with a big folded piece of paper. When they had reached the center of the room, facing all the students, they stopped, and the girl with the paper unfolded it. Then she spoke.

“The winner of the pennies-in-the-jar contest is...Michael Frempton. He guessed exactly the right number: one thousand, one hundred and forty-three! Come on up, Michael, and tell us how you did it!”

Alice watched as a boy from another class walked up to the front. But she was thinking, “Wow! I only missed it by one!”

Her friend Rebecca, sitting next to her, punched Alice on the arm to get her attention. “Hey, isn’t that almost the number you guessed?” Alice nodded a yes.

Now Michael spoke. “Well, I figured the jar was about twelve inches high and about ten inches around. So I could use math to figure out the volume inside the jar. And I know how big a penny is, and...”

Alice and most of the other kids had stopped listening by now. This Michael was a math whiz, evidently, and he could go on for hours explaining how the circumference of the jar and pi-squared did something that made the pennies do something so that he just had to write down that number that was exactly right.

Alice thought to herself, “I missed by just one, and I don’t know any of that math stuff yet. Hmm...Well, it would have been great to get that jar full of pennies, but that’s that!”

## Chapter 3

The next day was turning out to be just a typical school day, when the PA turned on in the classroom, and the principal's voice came over the loudspeaker.

“Attention, everyone! We have an announcement to make here in the office. Remember Michael's exact guess for the pennies-in-the-jar contest? Well, Michael wants to tell everyone something about that.”

Now Michael's voice came over the speaker. “Hi, everybody. I took the jar home yesterday, and last night my brother and I stacked all the pennies ten high and counted them. And guess what? My guess wasn't exactly right after all. There were really one thousand, one hundred and forty-four pennies! I guess I hadn't calculated the height of the jar close enough, or maybe I didn't notice how some of the pennies in the jar were...”

Suddenly the principal's voice came over the speaker again. “Thank-you, Michael. And thank-you for your patient counting and wanting to make everything clear and correct.”

At that moment, in two different parts of the school, there was a sudden change of mood. At one end of the school, Alice was frozen like an icicle – in shock. Her guess was right after all! Rebecca got up and ran over to Alice and punched her in the arm (again), which unfroze her instantly.

“Hey, everybody! Alice guessed it right! She got the right number of pennies. She told me. I remember. Right, Alice?”

And at the other end of the school, some older kids were suddenly digging through the trash can in their room, retrieving all the little scraps of paper they had thrown away just an hour ago.

“Alice, is that true?” asked her teacher.

“Well, yes, it's true...”

Then the loudspeaker came on again. It was the principal.

“Sorry to bother you again, but I have some updated news about the contest.”

A kid's voice came on next. “We just looked through the entries, and we found that someone had the exact *real* number. The new winner is Alice Westwright. Congratulations!”

Alice heard her name, and all her classmates applauded. Getting all this attention was almost like being in a dream. It didn't seem real. But the dream ended when Rebecca called out, “Not Alice Westwright. She's Alice Guessed-Right!”

And that's how it all started....

## Chapter 4

Michael the Math Genius had to return the jar and all the pennies the next day. The class that had organized the contest sent two representatives down to Alice's classroom to give her the prize. The principal came, too, and he gave a little speech about how everyone was a winner just for participating in the contest, and he hoped everyone learned something by comparing their guesses with the actual number. All the children listened attentively, not understanding half of what he said or meant.

Getting the jar home wasn't going to be easy. Just carrying it out the school door was difficult. After all, Alice wasn't very big, and the jar was bulky and heavy. She walked slowly to the bike rack, with the jar pressed against her chest, the top pressing against her chin. She looked at her bike. It had a basket on the front for things that didn't fit in her backpack, but when she imagined the glass jar bouncing around in a metal basket, all she could envision was glass and pennies all over the street on the way home. She frowned at her predicament.

Then she heard a familiar voice. Rebecca's mother was calling to her from a car across the street.

"Sweetie, Becca told me about the contest and your prize. Do you want a ride home?"

Alice was relieved. She absolutely wanted a ride home! So the bike went in the trunk with the help of some rope, and Alice rode with Rebecca in the back seat.

"Mom, Alice told me what she was going to write down for her guess. Isn't it great that I remembered, in case Alice forgot?"

"Yes, honey, that was great the way you remembered."

Alice didn't say anything. She never forgot stuff like that – well, almost never. In fact, she was the one who usually reminded her parents about appointments and dates and things like that. But her thoughts were interrupted by a poke in her arm.

"Alice, isn't it great that I remembered for you?"

"Sure, it's great. But you know what? What's even greater is the way you changed my name from Westwright to Guess-Right. That's really funny! Just don't keep doing it in front of everybody, okay?"

When Alice showed up at home with a jar full of pennies, her parents were amazed. So she told them the whole story – the contest, her guess, and the mix-up with the boy who had won at first.

"Alice, that's really wonderful that you were so lucky like that," said her mother. "Luck like that doesn't come around very often."

"True," added her father. "Enjoy the feeling, because it will be someone else's luck next time."

Then her parents started talking about grown-up stuff, and Alice only half-listened while she stacked pennies from her jar on the kitchen table. She knew why Michael had stacked them in

tens, but just for fun, she stacked them in sevens. But she did hear her father say something about getting a bonus from his boss. Then he interrupted her stacking with a question.

“Hey, Alice, here’s another contest for you: Guess how much my bonus will be, okay? If you get as close as one hundred dollars to the real number, I’ll buy you an ice cream – any flavor you want.”

Alice looked up from her stacking. She loved ice cream – especially the special flavor cones at a certain shop nearby. Her eyes got big with the thought of it.

“Well, I *guess* you’ll get three hundred and eighty dollars – and some extra dimes and pennies.”

Her father laughed. “Okay, that’s your guess. But you should know that bonuses don’t work that way. They’re always whole dollars – usually whole hundreds.”

Alice shrugged her shoulders and went back to stacking. To her, it didn’t matter, since all she had to do was get close enough to get an ice cream. But then her mother made her undo all her stacking, because it was time to set the table for dinner.

## Chapter 5

If Alice's parents were glad but not impressed with her winning contest guess, things were different at school. Alice's classmates started asking her to guess things – all sorts of things.

“Alice, guess what's in my lunch bag today.”

“Alice, where do you think my hairbrush is?”

“Hey Alice Guess-Right, which substitute teacher do you think we'll get tomorrow?”

“Alice, guess what color soccer ball I'm going to get after school.”

“Ms. Guess-Right, what am I holding in my fist?”

And every time, Alice would look at the person, then say “Well, I *guess*...” And every time, it turned out she was right!

At first, it was a funny game. But after a while, her ability to guess right got downright *spooky*. So some kids stopped asking her, and other kids kept wanting to test her. But Alice tried to avoid guessing whenever she could.

Then came the incident with the snowglobe. Her teacher had one of those on her desk. Inside the globe, there was a little castle, and when you shook the globe, snow would fly around the castle in the most magical way. Everyone loved to give it a shake and a stare whenever there was a chance.

But one day it was missing!

Obviously, someone had stolen it. But who? And why? And where was it now?

The teacher had a talk with the whole class. She told the children that it made her very sad, and a little angry, that someone would take something belonging to someone else, and spoil everyone's enjoyment of the thing. And she would not punish the person who did it, if the snowglobe showed up again soon.

Someone raised a hand with a suggestion. “Couldn't you just ask Alice to guess who has it or where it is?”

The teacher frowned. “No, that's probably not a good idea. First, who's to say that Alice would guess it correctly? And second, I really want the person who took it to be honest and return it, without pressure from me or Alice or anyone else.”

But the snowglobe didn't show up for the rest of the day. The next day, the teacher brought up the subject again. She even asked the students to think of ideas for solving this situation. And that's when Rebecca called out, “Alice, what's your guess? Where is the snowglobe?”

And before the teacher could stop her, Alice said, “Well, I *guess* it's...it's...it's not anywhere!”

What a strange answer! The teacher was startled, and so were all the kids in the class. And somehow Alice's remark seemed to end the discussion.

Later, at recess, Alice and Rebecca saw some classmates out at the far end of the playground, in a grassy field. They were standing around in a circle, and they seemed to be arguing. The two girls decided to go investigate.

When they approached the group, one boy said, “Hey, it’s Alice. I guess it’s okay for her to hear this, since she’ll probably guess it anyway.”

“Guess what?” asked Alice.

“One of us – but I won’t tell you which one of us – had the snowglobe yesterday and brought it out here. And it fell down this hole.”

So that’s why they were standing around like that. In the middle of their circle, there was a big crack in the soil, and they kept staring at it, as if they hoped it would spit up the snowglobe.

“We’ve all put our arms down there, and the hole is so deep that none of us can feel the bottom!”

Alice looked at the hole in the ground for a long time. Then she spoke very softly. “Then it really isn’t...anywhere....”

The boys all turned and looked at her with astonishment. Her guess was right after all.

## Chapter 6

Alice didn't know whether or not to tell her parents about the snowglobe. The more she thought about it, the harder it seemed to describe. How could she explain about being right about something not being anywhere? Her parents would probably tell her that there could be a million ways a thing could be not anywhere, so the guess wasn't all that incredible.

But it turned out that the snowglobe story wasn't necessary to get her parents to get serious about her guessing ability. Alice's father came home that evening in a daze. He plunked himself down on the living room sofa and just stared into space. Both Alice and her mother noticed this strange behavior.

"Daddy, are you okay?"

"Bill, what happened? Are you alright?"

"I'm alright. But look at my bonus check." He pulled out the folded-up check from his shirt pocket and waved it around in front of him. Alice's mother took it and unfolded it. Then she read the amount written on the check.

"It says three hundred eighty dollars...and thirty-two cents! What an odd number. How is that possible?"

"Because," her father explained in a far-away voice, "because the bookkeeping department has some new rules. My bonus was exactly four hundred dollars, but they held back some of it for taxes. And Alice gets an ice cream...any flavor...and I don't know how she did it...and...maybe my daughter is...is..." He didn't know how to finish the sentence.

Alice felt sorry for her father. He had been so full of fun anticipating his bonus, and now it seemed he didn't enjoy it at all. But it really wasn't *her* fault that she guessed so well.

"Daddy, I don't really want an ice cream after all."

Her father looked up at her sad eyes, and suddenly he sat up.

"Darling, I will be a very proud papa to take you out for an ice cream. I don't know how you did it. Maybe I knew about the tax stuff a long time ago and said something here at home, and then forgot. Never mind, though. Let's *all* go out for ice cream – *before* dinner!"

## Chapter 7

A few days after her father got the bonus check, Alice went to school and realized that she had no lunch and no money to buy food in the cafeteria. Her teacher called the office, and the office tried to locate a parent to bring food or money. When lunchtime was getting close, her teacher let her go to the office to wait.

Alice entered the office and sat on a chair, next to a boy from a younger grade. They both sat in silence for a few minutes. Then the boy turned to Alice and said, "I'm waiting for my mom to pick me up. She's taking me out of school for the whole rest of the day! But she didn't say why. Isn't that funny? Why do you think she's doing that?"

Alice looked at the boy, and she could tell that he was just talking and asking questions to pass the time. She decided to be nice to him.

"Well, I *guess* it's so she can take you to the doctor to get a shot." The words came out so easily, so innocently.

The little boy's eyes got very, very wide. Alice knew what was happening: he was getting scared.

"A shot? I'm going to get a shot? His voice got quivery and louder. "I hate shots! I hate, hate, hate, hate shots!!!! I DON'T WANT TO GET A SHOT!!!!!"

And that was just the moment when his mother walked into the office.

Now the boy started yelling and crying and waving his arms all at the same time. "I DON'T WANT A SHOT!!! DON'T MAKE ME GET A SHOT!!! DON'T MAKE ME GO!!!"

Alice wanted to run away, but there wasn't anywhere to go. She felt glued to the chair.

The mother ran up to her son. "Oh, baby, who said I was taking you to get a shot?" said the mother, in as soothing a voice as she could, knowing she really *was* taking him for a shot. She looked at everyone in the office, embarrassed about the scene the boy was making, and at the same time looking around the room to see who might have caused him to go berserk.

"*She* did!" yelled the boy, pointing at Alice. "*She* told me about the doctor and the shot!" And now he gave up talking and just sobbed with fear and self-pity.

The mother looked at Alice, who was trying to appear innocent. But her eyes were wide with fear.

"How dare you scare my little boy like that! What kind of bully are you?" Then she turned to face the grownups who ran the office.

"How could you let this girl sit here and scare the daylights out of my boy? Aren't you paying attention to what's going on here?"

And as she shouted these words, Alice's mother walked into the office.

## Chapter 8

Understandably, Alice did not go back to class with the lunch her mother had brought. Instead, mother and daughter went to a nearby park and had a picnic – and a talk.

“Alice, I’m sure you wouldn’t scare that little boy just to be mean. That’s not like you at all. So tell me what really happened.”

Alice was upset and confused. Now she felt some relief to know that her mother was on her side. So she told how she went to the office to wait, and how the little boy started talking and asking questions, and how she just said the first thing that came to mind.

“How was I supposed to know he would freak out? How was I supposed to know that he really was going to a doctor for a shot? I just…” and now her voice got quieter, “…guessed.”

Her mother’s face made a twitch as she recognized the same pattern as when her daughter guessed about the bonus check. But she put a calm face back on and stayed silent for a while.

“Honey, I don’t know how you got so good at guessing. But now that it’s happening, you’ll need to stop yourself before you make guesses, and think about how your guess might feel to the other person.”

Alice knew that was the right advice, because having that boy scream right next to her, and having that mother make angry accusations, had already told her that she better watch her tongue from now on.

“Yes, I know. I’ll try really hard to think before I tell my guess.”

“You know, Alice, if there was a cure for your guessing, I would take *you* to the doctor for a shot to do that!” Then her mother laughed, and so did Alice.

## Chapter 9

When Alice arrived at school the next day, her teacher told her that the principal wanted to see her right away. Alice knew why, but the talk with her mother the day before made her feel stronger and more confident. So although she didn't want to see the principal, she felt fairly calm about it.

When she arrived at the office, she was taken immediately to the principal's office – no waiting in a chair next to another kid this time!

The principal wore his friendly but professional face, with a little bit of worry wrinkles showing around his forehead.

"Alice, that was quite a blow-up yesterday, wasn't it?"

"Yes, sir. But I didn't mean to make the boy upset. Really!"

"I know. And I also know you are the one who guessed the pennies in the jar exactly right – without doing any math. So it seems you are getting a *reputation* around here, if you know the meaning of that word."

"Not exactly."

"Alice, a reputation is the way people think about you – when they all think the same thing. You have gotten a reputation for guessing things right. I'm not sure that's fair to you. Just because you guessed a couple of things right, that doesn't mean that you *always* guess right, does it? Maybe you don't deserve that reputation. What do you think?"

Alice couldn't answer. She knew it wasn't just a couple of times, but ten or twenty times, both at school and at home. Maybe she *did* deserve that reputation. But probably that was not what the principal wanted to hear. So she just looked down at the floor.

"Okay, Alice, let's talk about people's feelings. I'm sure you didn't *mean* to upset the boy about going to the doctor, but I'm concerned about how you blurted out something that could upset a younger child, even if you didn't mean to be mean."

"I know. My mom talked to me about that yesterday. And I promised to try really hard not to tell my guess until I thought about people's feelings first."

The principal smiled, relieved that a parent had already done the work he felt he had to do.

"Well, then, there's no need to have that conversation all over again with me. Instead, let's see if I can help you feel better about this reputation. This morning I found a letter in my mailbox from my boss. He wants to have a meeting with me in a few days. Why don't you guess what the meeting is about? Then I'll tell you what really happened at the meeting. And when your guess is wrong, we can tell everyone, so that reputation can start to go away. Ready to guess?"

Alice looked at the man, and remembered to think about his feelings. But she also wanted to be honest.

"I *guess* you're going to be going to another school to be principal."

The principal jerked in his chair for just a fraction of a second, then smiled calmly at Alice.

“Alright, that’s your guess. Now I’ll guess. I guess that my boss wants to talk about choosing a new mascot for our school, because the one we have doesn’t seem right to some of the parents. So now we’ll see if either of us is right, and I’ll let you know. Okay?”

Alice felt a twinge. She felt sorry for her principal to be making such ridiculous guess. She assumed that grownups could guess better than that.

“Okay,” she said, as she climbed out of her chair and moved toward the door. “And thank-you for being so nice about this.”

“Well, thank-you, Alice. And thank your mom for me.”

When Alice left, the principal leaned back in his chair and chuckled. Kids could be such magical thinkers!

## Chapter 10

Evidently, Alice really was getting a reputation. The guessing game that had started with her classmates began to change. For one thing, kids from other classes came up to her at lunch or recess to ask her to guess things – kids she didn't know or recognize, even kids who were quite a bit older.

The other change happened when a girl came up to Alice and offered her money for making a guess. What a shock! She didn't know what to say, but she made the guess anyway. The girl handed her a quarter and ran off to tell her friends.

Alice looked at the quarter, all shiny and *hers* now. Wow! A quarter just for making a guess! She felt proud and famous and...guilty.

On the one hand, she liked getting money – not for herself, but for her whole family. She had heard her parents talking about maybe taking a vacation trip, but not having enough money for it. She liked the idea of the whole family traveling together and having fun in some new place. So getting money for guessing could be her way to contribute to the family trip.

On the other hand, she wasn't sure it was right to accept other kids' money for guessing things. What if she was wrong? Would kids want their money back? But what if she was right? If they knew they were going to get a right answer, they wouldn't be able to blame her if they felt hurt or shocked by her guess. Or would they?

Should she talk to her parents about this? Something told her they would tell her not to take money, ever, for guessing. But what if she didn't tell them and just walked into the living room one day with hundreds of dollars in dimes and quarters, and said it was all for the family vacation trip? Wouldn't she have to tell them where all the coins came from? But by then, she couldn't give them back, because they would have come from so many different kids that she couldn't remember them all. Would it be alright to keep the coins and take a trip with them, if she promised not to do it again?

Back in her classroom, she doodled while her teacher read an after-lunch story. Her doodles took the shape of dollar signs with hearts and wings on them. Were the dollars flying toward her or away from her? Then she had an idea, an idea that seemed to solve the whole problem, at least in her young mind.

She would never, ever, ask for money for guesses. She would never, ever, expect money for guesses. That was her choice. But if someone wanted to *give* her some money for guessing, that was another person's choice. And there didn't seem to be anything wrong with accepting what another person *wanted* to give.

*There!* That settled it. Problem solved. And if she had a lot of coins from people who felt they just *had* to give her something for guessing, then surely her parents would understand and use the money for the family vacation. Alice would be proud to contribute, and her parents would be proud that she had helped.

Just then, the loudspeaker came on, and the principal's voice came through the room.

“Hello, everyone. I just wanted to interrupt all the great learning going on for a few moments. It’s important to me that news gets around that is accurate. That’s much better than people spreading rumors because they don’t have all the facts. So I want to tell everyone in the school a piece of news about myself. At the end of this school year, I will be leaving this wonderful school to become principal of another school in town. This other school needs some extra special help, and I am proud that I was chosen to go there and give them my help. I’m sure I will miss you all. So let’s make the rest of this school year a great one – one I will remember forever!

“Oh, and, um...could Alice Westwright come to my office? I, um, have something special I need to tell, um, explain, um, ask her.”

# PART 2

## **Alice Helps Her Human and Animal Friends**

## Chapter 11

Alice's teacher brought a rabbit to school. The rabbit was all black, and it seemed content to munch vegetables while the children gathered around to ooh and ahh. When everyone was back in their seats, the teacher announced that the rabbit needed a name, and it would be a class decision.

First, the children were allowed to talk amongst themselves, comparing ideas. Then there would be a vote. The name that finally got a majority of votes would win, and the class would have a name for their new friend.

As the room buzzed with talk, Rebecca sidled over to Alice. Alice knew what was coming: a poke in the arm and a question.

Since Rebecca could see Alice bracing for the poke, she decided to skip that part, and launched into her question.

"Well, Ms. Guess-Right, what do you guess this bunny's name is?"

Alice opened her mouth to give her guess, but all that came out was a tiny cough and even tinier sneeze. Then she twitched her nose.

"Gee, Alice, maybe you're getting sick! I'm not going to stand next to you," Rebecca said as she moved away.

Alice didn't feel sick. She just felt surprised. Where did that cough-sneeze come from? And why didn't she have a guess for Rebecca's question?

After all the conversation, it was time to vote for favorite names. In the end, the class decided to name the rabbit Hunny – H-U-N-N-Y, short for Hunny Bunny. (That's why they didn't want to use the regular spelling for the stuff you put on toast. They wanted it to look like and rhyme with "bunny.")

Just as the naming came to a close, one of Alice's classmates walked in, late for school. Everyone turned to look.

Then a friend shouted, "We just got a bunny, and then we named it!"

"Oh, I missed it," said the late-comer. "What's the bunny's name?"

Everyone shouted "Hunny!"

That is, everyone but Alice. She was going to say the same thing that everyone else did, but instead, out came that same little cough-sneeze, and her nose twitched afterward! It was so quiet that no one heard her, with all the shouting going on. But Rebecca noticed. She and Alice looked at each other across the room. Rebecca tilted her head, with an odd look on her face. Alice shrugged her shoulders in utter confusion.

Later, at recess, Rebecca asked Alice about it. "Do you think you're allergic to the new rabbit?"

Alice thought a moment. "No, I've been around rabbits before, so I know the rabbit isn't making me do that. Anyway, I've only done it twice."

"Yeah, only twice," repeated Rebecca. "And only when the rabbit's name comes up."

Alice looked hard at Rebecca. “Hmmm. You’re right – only when the rabbit’s name.... Well, I don’t get it. Let’s go play and forget about this.”

They ran off to play, but Alice didn’t really forget.

## Chapter 12

At home that evening, her parents asked Alice about her school day. She was eager to tell about the new class pet. After all, it was *so* cute!

“It was a complete surprise!” she told them. “Our teacher never said anything about it, and then there it was! And we got to name it, too!”

Her father asked the obvious question. “So what’s the bunny’s name?”

And out came the little cough-sneeze. And her nose twitched. Alice quickly tried to ignore all that by saying, “We voted for Hunny Bunny – but we’ll call it Hunny for short.”

Alice’s mother did not miss the little noise. “Are you feeling okay? Maybe I should take your temperature.”

“Mom, I feel fine! But go ahead and take my temperature, just to make you feel better.” Alice said this casually, but deep down, she was a little worried, and thought that maybe it would be a good idea to see if she *was* getting sick.

Her temperature was normal, and she didn’t make that noise again all evening, but her mother made her go to bed early anyway, just to be sure.

Going to bed early must have cause Alice to wake early. Unable to go back to sleep, she started thinking about that cute bunny again. She loved the way it munched food and wiggled its nose. And that made her think about her cough-sneeze-twitch, every time the bunny’s name came up.

“Wait a minute! My nose twitched just like the bunny’s does. But only when the bunny’s name....”

And then a wild and crazy thought crossed her mind. What if the cough-sneeze-twitch was the bunny’s name? After all, Hunny was just a name that a bunch of kids came up with. But maybe real rabbits have their own names in their own rabbit language. Maybe their names weren’t made of words, like human names, but made of things that bunnies could do with their mouths and faces. Maybe...maybe...

“Oh, that’s so dumb!” Alice said out loud. And with that, she got out of bed and started getting ready for school, even though it was much earlier than usual. But as long as she was up, she might as well get to school before the other kids, and ... and... try talking to the bunny!

## Chapter 13

The school custodian had recognized Alice and let her in to her classroom even before the teacher arrived – with the promise that Alice would not ask for this kind of favor again. When the teacher arrived, she found the door unlocked, with Alice sitting at her desk, writing.

“Alice, what are doing here so early? Are you finishing some homework?”

Alice looked up. “No, this isn’t homework. It’s... well, it’s kind of like dictation.”

The teacher looked around the room. “Maybe you don’t really understand the word *dictation*, Alice. It means writing down someone else’s words and sentences, and there isn’t anyone else here in the room. So instead of dictation, maybe you mean another word.”

Alice looked down at her paper, the back up at her teacher. “It *is* dictation...sort of. I mean, I’m writing down what I’ve heard. Well, not *heard*, exactly, but what I’ve been *told*. Well, not *told*, either, but...*Here!*” And with that, she picked up the paper and waved it at her teacher.

The teacher walked over and took the paper, then began reading it. “I really don’t like the loud noises when kids come back from recess and lunch. But I like their soft voices when they talk to me. I like carrots, except not when they are old and floppy. I really like....’ Alice, this looks like a list of things you like and dislike about school. Are you unhappy about being part of our classroom?”

“Oh, no! I like you and I like being here and I have friends here. This list isn’t about *me*. It’s about....” Now Alice looked down, and her voice dropped to almost a whisper. “This is about... Hunny Bunny.” And then she mumbled, “Hunny Bunny told me these things.... And I thought you ought to know.... So I wrote them all down....”

Her teacher looked at Alice, then looked at the paper, then at Alice again. Then she pulled a student chair over and sat down next to the girl, who was staring down at her desk.

“Alice, let me see if I got this right. You came in early today, and our rabbit told you some things, so you wrote them down. You know rabbits can’t really talk, don’t you?”

Alice looked up. “Sure, rabbits can’t talk. I know that. But rabbits have rabbit language, with their noses and snuffles and stuff. And I found out that I could *guess* what Hunny was saying. I even...I even guessed her rabbit-language name.”

Alice looked so sincere and so matter-of-fact, but at the same time timid, because she knew she would be doubted. The teacher stared at that face a long time before speaking.

“Alice, I know all about your guessing, and how it always seems to be right, and how it’s gotten you in trouble at times. That’s pretty incredible all by itself. Now you say that you can guess what our rabbit is thinking and feeling. That gets even more incredible. I don’t want to doubt you, but maybe we need proof. Let’s look at this list and see if there are things on it we can test and find out if what you wrote really is what the rabbit feels. Okay?”

Alice was relieved and grateful. Her teacher was willing to believe her enough to try some experiments. “Sure, that would be great. Can we test the one about the carrots, and maybe the one about the cold water in her tube?”

“Yes, those would be easy to test. And let’s get everyone else in the room to help with the experiments. It would be a good science lesson.”

Alice wasn’t sure she wanted everyone to know about the rabbit language guessing. But then, if she was right about her guesses, it would be important for everyone to know why the rabbit needed things a certain way. So she quickly changed her mind. It would be just fine to let everyone join the experiments.

So as her classmates came bursting into the room this morning, Alice was ready. She would get to test herself and be Hunny’s great interpreter and protector!

## Chapter 14

The class voted to test two things: what kind of carrot Hunny liked best, and what temperature of water the rabbit preferred.

For the carrot test, they prepared three little dishes. One had a piece of a raw, fresh carrot; one had a piece of an older, softer, raw carrot; and one had a piece of cooked carrot. Before placing them in the cage, one boy suggested, “Shouldn’t Alice leave the room, so she can’t tell Hunny which one to choose?”

Alice spoke up quickly. “I can’t talk to Hunny! I can only guess what she is saying in rabbit language.” She looked at the teacher, not wanting to miss the experiment.

The teacher agreed. “Alice never said she can talk rabbit-talk, did she? So let’s let her stay and watch just like everyone else. But don’t ask her to guess which one Hunny will choose.”

No worry there! No one wanted to know Alice’s guess. This was science! And to make it truly scientific, the teacher had the students start filling out an experiment sheet, with a hypothesis and a description of how the experiment would be carried out.

Once everyone had written a hypothesis and explained the procedure of the experiment, it was time to begin. The dishes were placed in the cage, and everyone watched quietly. Hunny approached each dish, sniffing and wrinkling a pink nose, but each one a little differently. Finally, Hunny went back to the stiff raw carrot and grabbed it out of the dish.

Everyone started talking and cheering. “Wait!” said the teacher. “Let’s see which one Hunny chooses second.”

The room got quiet again. Hunny finished the first carrot, then sniffed the other dishes. The soft raw carrot went next.

Again the room erupted in noise, with several triumphantly telling they just *knew* which would be the first and second choices. The teacher calmed them down again, then said, “Let’s leave Hunny alone and see if the third dish is empty in a little while.”

A half-hour later, when Rebecca was asked to check, the dish was indeed empty. The teacher had everyone finish writing up the experiment sheet with all the results.

The next day, the students wrote new sheets, predicting which temperature of water Hunny would prefer. Then three little cups of water were placed in the cage: one with cold water from the fountain in the hallway, one with tap water from the faucet in the classroom, and one with warm water that had been heated by the sun in a window.

Hunny sniffed each one, wrinkling that little nose. Alice looked carefully this time at the different nose wrinklings and made her own silent guess. Then Hunny took a drink from the cup with tap water. Everyone began to talk excitedly, but the teacher made them all go back to their desks to finish filling out their experiment sheets.

“But shouldn’t we wait to see which one Hunny chooses second?” asked one boy.

“I doubt that it would do any good,” explained the teacher. “By the time Hunny gets thirsty again, the cold water will warm up and the warm water will cool down.”

Everyone could see the sense of that, so the experiment was over.

Naturally, Alice had predicted correctly on both experiments. But she wondered what the difference was between predicting and guessing. She figured that for some kids, there would be a big difference. But for her, she wasn't so sure....

## Chapter 15

When the teacher made a graph of everyone's predictions and compared it to the actual results, it turned out that only a few students had predicted both experiments correctly. And everyone couldn't help but notice that Alice was one of them.

As the class discussed the graph and the results, Rebecca piped up with some information that had previously only been known to her and Alice. She tried to say it very scientifically.

"Alice told me she *predicted* Hunny Bunny's real name!"

Everyone turned and stared at Alice, waiting for the answer. Alice looked down and tried to cover her mouth and nose, which wasn't a very smart thing to do.

"Go ahead, tell them!" demanded Rebecca.

The teacher intervened. "Alice, you don't have to do anything you're uncomfortable doing. But if you would like to tell us, go ahead."

So Alice stopped suffocating herself and guessed Hunny's real name, which of course was not a human sounding name at all.

Everyone seemed impressed. Then one girl asked, very scientifically, "Can you *predict* Hunny Bunny's *mother's* name?"

Out came a little cough-sneeze-hiccup.

A boy asked, "What about the father's name?"

Out came a little cough-cough-hiccup.

Since no one doubted Alice's ability anymore, kids started firing prediction questions from all sides.

"What's the rabbit word for *carrot*?"

"What's the rabbit word for *lettuce*?"

"What's the rabbit word for *water*?"

Now Alice was coughing and sneezing and blinking and hiccupping and wrinkling her nose in quick succession. It was if her face was out of control!

And then someone shouted, "What's the rabbit word for *hawk*?"

Now Alice's whole face changed. Her eyes got big, her nostrils spread out, and she nearly gagged. Then out came a shrill and ugly squeal! "EEEEEEEEEE!!!!!"

Kids near her covered their ears.

"EEEEEEEEEE!!!!!" Someone ducked under a desk.

"EEEEEEEEEE!!!!!" Someone started to cry.

"EEEEEEEEEE!!!!!" Someone pulled out an asthma inhaler.

"EEEEEEEEEE!!!!!" And a few started to run toward the door.

"ALICE!" shouted the teacher, trying to be louder than the deafening squeal.

Alice stopped, dumbfounded by her own voice. She stared at the teacher with eyes still wide. Then she collapsed on the floor, shivered a little, and fell asleep, exhausted.

## Chapter 16

Everyone with a pet at home started asking Alice to come over after school. Then the questions would start flying:

“Alice, can you guess why my cat won’t eat this food we bought her?”

“Alice, can you guess what color squeaky toy my dog would like best?”

“Alice, guess what my white rat wants for a hiding place.”

“Alice, watch my hamster run in her wheel. Can you guess what other kind of exercise she might like?”

Alice would guess, and the next day at school, her new friend would report how her guess had been so great for solving a mystery or deciding what to buy on a shopping trip. But the report wouldn’t be private. Several other kids would hear about it, and they told their friends in other grades and their families, too.

Alice was pleased about one thing: Her guesses were making pet owners happier and making the pets happier as well. It gave her a warm feeling to know that she was able to communicate animals’ thoughts to their owners and help make a better life for all of them.

But Alice was not so pleased with another thing: She was getting invited to lots of homes and seeing lots of pets, but she wasn’t sure if she was really becoming a friend to any of the kids who did this. How could she tell if they liked her or if they just wanted her guesses? One girl invited her over four times, which made Alice think maybe they were becoming friends. But every visit became another pet guessing session. (The girl had two mice and two goldfish. So each visit was devoted to one of them.)

Alice didn’t want to say no to anyone’s request, because she liked animals so much herself and she didn’t have one of her own. But if she kept saying yes all the time, she wouldn’t get to spend as much time with her true friends, like Rebecca.

In fact, Rebecca had a parakeet and had never asked Alice for a guess about it. Why not? Was Rebecca satisfied with her relationship with her pet, and never had any questions or mysteries? Was Rebecca such a good friend that she didn’t want to make Alice think that all she wanted was help and advice? Either way, it was fine with Alice. But she did miss seeing her friend once or twice a week.

## Chapter 17

One day at lunch, a girl named Maria asked Alice to come over after school. Maria had almost never talked to her, so Alice figured it must be about a pet.

“Do you have a pet?” Alice asked innocently.

“Yes!” exclaimed Maria. “I have a parakeet who is very, very smart and very cute.”

Alice said yes, and got permission after school to go visit.

Maria was happy to see Alice outside of school. Alice could tell, because Maria gave a tour of her house and backyard, and got snacks for both of them – without ever mentioning her pet bird.

Alice was impressed. “I’m glad you invited me. We never talk at school, so I didn’t think you would ever want to see me after school.”

Maria confessed, “Well, you’re so popular these days, I was afraid to talk to you. I thought you might already have lots of friends.”

Alice was even more impressed. “Lots of friends? Ha! Not really. I have lots of kids asking me over once, and hardly ever a second time.”

Maria looked confused. “Why would they do that?”

“Because they want me to make a guess about their pets’ food or toys or something. That’s all.”

“Well, that’s silly. I know you guess right, but if they ask you a question about their pet, then maybe they don’t know their pet very well, do they?”

Now Alice was more impressed than ever. Maria was not just someone who would make a good friend. She was someone who understood a lot more than she said out loud. For the first time since all this began, Alice actually *wished* someone would be her friend.

Maria didn’t wait for an answer to her question. “Would you like to meet Rosita, my parakeet? I bet she would like you. But I don’t have any questions to ask. Rosita and I know all about each other already.”

“Yeah! Let’s go see Rosita!” shouted Alice, a little too loud. But then, she couldn’t help herself. She was excited to meet a bird with no mysteries, owned by a girl who had no questions.

## Chapter 18

The next day, Alice was telling Rebecca about her visit with Maria. Just then, Maria came into view, and Alice called her over.

Rebecca started. “Alice says you have a parakeet. So do I! Is yours a girl or a boy? What color is it?”

Maria explained, “Rosita is a girl, and she’s mostly blue and green. She’s really, really smart. Right, Alice?”

Alice agreed. “You bet! Her parakeet knows a whole bunch of tricks. She can even roll over like a dog!”

Rebecca frowned. “I can’t get Mr. Bixby to learn any tricks. Maybe he’s stupid, or maybe I just don’t know how to teach him right.”

“Oh, no, parakeets aren’t stupid!” corrected Maria. “But you have to be patient and you have to reward him with something he really, really likes.”

Alice piped up. “Ha! Mr. Bixby loves pretzels! You should give him pretzels, Rebecca!”

“But only a tiny piece of a pretzel at a time,” warned Maria. “Otherwise, he’ll get sick and lazy about doing the trick.”

Rebecca could tell she was talking with an expert. “Okay, okay. But I still don’t think I can get Mr. Bixby to learn a trick. Can you help me?”

And that’s when the three girls decided to meet after school – and to get their parakeets together for a visit.

## Chapter 19

It was a few days before all the girls could get together at Maria's house. Alice arrived first, and she got to watch Rosita do a new trick: walking along Maria's outstretched arm and taking a treat from between Maria's teeth.

In a little while, Rebecca arrived, carrying Mr. Bixby in his cage. Rosita was back in her cage by now, and she squawked at these strangers coming into her territory. Mr. Bixby squawked back.

Maria frowned. "I've never had another bird come to visit before. I'm not sure if Rosita is happy about it or not."

Rebecca wasn't too sure about the situation, either. "Same here. Mr. Bixby hasn't seen another parakeet since he left the pet store. And that was a long time ago."

Then the two girls turned to Alice.

"Well," began Alice, "I *guess* they just need to get used to each other and make sure one won't hurt the other."

Maria came up with a solution. "Why don't we put the cages next to each other? That way, they can see each other and get familiar."

That seemed like a perfect idea, so Rebecca placed her cage on Maria's desk, and Maria took her cage off her dresser and put it on the desk as well.

Suddenly it got quiet, as the two birds studied each other. Each stood on a wooden perch. They turned their heads from side to side, eyeing each other from a distance.

"That's an improvement!" said Rebecca, uncovering her ears.

Then the two birds jumped down from their perches and walked up to the edges of their cages, facing each other. Now they started tweeting, not squawking, at each other.

"Wow, that's a *big* improvement!" exclaimed Maria.

"Let's let them out of their cages now," suggested Rebecca. "They seem to like each other!"

Maria agreed, and they both unlatched their cages. Rosita walked out first, since she was familiar with leaving her cage in this room. She walked over to the open door of Mr. Bixby's cage and stood looking at him. He looked back, a bit unsure what to do next.

Rosita tweeted. Mr. Bixby tweeted back. Rosita tweeted again. Mr. Bixby answered again. Then he stepped out of his cage and walked up to her.

The girls held their breath. Would this meeting work out alright?

Rosita pecked Mr. Bixby's beak. He stared back. She pecked his beak again. Then he pecked her beak. They started walking in a circle, facing each other, taking turns pecking the other's beak.

"Is that how parakeets kiss?" asked Alice.

The other girls looked at her. They didn't have an answer. And they expected Alice to answer her own question with a guess.

"Well, I *guess* it's not really kissing. It's just how they want to get to know each other."

The girls kept watching the two parakeets circling each other. Then suddenly Rosita launched off the desk and started flying around the room. Mr. Bixby and the girls watched.

Rosita tweeted as she flew around. She tweeted as she lit on the dresser. She took off again. She landed on a bookcase and tweeted again. Mr. Bixby seemed to get the idea. He tweeted and fluttered off the desk and into the air.

Now the birds were flying around the room, tweeting to each other. Was it follow-the-leader or a game of chase? It was hard to tell. But one thing was certain: the two birds had become friends.

“This is *great!*” shouted Rebecca. “I’ve never seen him so excited.”

Maria was equally happy. “Rosita really likes him. I can tell. She’s letting him touch everything in the room!”

All three girls laughed and pointed at the birds’ antics. It was like watching a miniature circus.

Rebecca looked at the clock on the desk. “Uh oh, my mom will be here in a few minutes. I’ve got to get Mr. Bixby back in his cage.”

“Okay,” said Maria. What sound do you make to get him to do that?”

Rebecca hesitated. “Uh, I don’t have a sound. I’ve never had to think about it before!”

Now the birds were perched on a curtain rod, far up out of reach.

Rebecca tried being charming and cheerful. “Oh, Mr. Bixby! Come back to your cage now, sweet boy!”

Mr. Bixby looked down at her and cocked his head, as if he was trying to understand what she was saying.

Rebecca got frustrated, and her voice got more strident. “Mr. Bixby. Come down right now and get in here,” she said, as she tapped on the opening of his cage.

Mr. Bixby stared at her, cocking his head to the other side.

Rebecca lost patience. “Get down here! You know what I mean! Don’t pretend you don’t understand!”

Mr. Bixby decided it was time to stop looking at Rebecca and tweet to Rosita instead.

“GRRRRR!! Now you’re just ignoring me!” shouted Rebecca.

Maria had an idea. “Let me get Rosita in her cage. Maybe that will give him the right idea.” And she gave a whistle. Rosita fluttered down from the curtain rod and lit on Maria’s shoulder. Maria picked him up gently, and in a moment, Rosita was safe inside her cage, with the door closed.

“Okay, Rebecca, try again.”

Rebecca tried to imitate Maria’s whistle. But of course Mr. Bixby wasn’t familiar with that sound, so he didn’t move from the curtain rod.

Rebecca was nearly in tears. “My mom wants me to be ready when she gets here, and this silly bird is going to get me in trouble!”

Then Alice remembered something that happened at school. “*What’s the rabbit word for hawk?*” That question sparked an idea.

“Rebecca, Mr. Bixby is too happy to come down. He doesn’t want his happy time to end. We have to make him *not* happy! Remember the assembly with the hawk? Remember the sound it made? Let’s all make the sound of a hawk!”

The girls tried hard to remember that sound. Alice remembered best, and when she made the sound, the other two girls imitated her.

“Scree! Scree! Scree! Scree!”

Sure enough, Mr. Bixby turned his head and started looking for the source of the sound.

“Rebecca, stop making the sound! Go to his cage and show him it’s safe there!” Alice started making the sound again, but moved across the room to get away from the cage. She motioned for Maria to do the same. This way, there was a straight line between the curtain and the cage, with the dangerous sound coming from somewhere else.

Mr. Bixby heard the sound coming from across the room and saw Rebecca tapping the open doorway of his cage. In an instant, he shoved off from the curtain and zoomed to the cage. Rebecca nudged him inside, then closed the door.

“Whew! That was *excellent*, Alice!” said Rebecca with relief and satisfaction.

“Yeah, that was great! I never would have thought of that,” agreed Maria.

Rebecca wondered, “Hey Alice, did you guess that idea, or did you just think of it?”

Alice was startled by the question. How *had* she thought of it? Had she made a quick secret guess? Or did she come up with the idea some other way? What made her remember the assembly with the birds – the same assembly where the pennies-in-the-jar contest results were announced?

“I *guess*...I don’t know for sure!”

## Chapter 20

When the parakeet story got around the school, Alice had a new reputation. Now she was not only a guesser who was never wrong, but also an animal expert. That was probably not a very accurate description of Alice's ability, but the reputation stuck.

As you probably know, stories and reputations don't stay inside school. Stories get told at home, and they spread through the community. And sometimes, even beyond the community....

One evening, Alice's father answered a phone call. After he spoke to the caller for a few minutes, he called Alice over to the phone.

"Alice, this man wants to talk to you. He's from the zoo."

The *zoo*? The zoo was many miles away, in a big city. How could anyone there know about Alice? And why would someone there want to talk to her? Alice took the phone from her father, who smiled at her and nodded his head. This made Alice feel more comfortable talking to a stranger on the phone.

"Alice Westwright?"

"Yes, I'm Alice."

"Hi! My name is Charles Hastings. I'm the head veterinarian at the zoo. I've heard about you from some friends who live in your town, and I wonder if you could help us here at the zoo hospital?"

Alice was startled. Help a veterinarian? Wow, help a veterinarian! It was like a dream come true!

"I would love to help you. But really, all I've done is guess some things about kids' pets. I don't know anything about zoo animals."

"Well, Alice, we're stumped about some cases we have here, and we could use all the help we can get – even guessing help. Would you be willing to come and offer your kind of help?"

Alice was proud but embarrassed. "Just a minute. I have to talk to my parents."

She placed her hand over the mouthpiece and looked at her father. He was still smiling, but now with a quizzical look on his face, as if to say "All this seems weird to me, too, but why not?"

Just then her mother stepped up and asked what was going on.

Alice tried to explain in just a few words. "This is the vet at the zoo. He wants me to guess about some sick animals. Is it okay?"

Her parents looked at each other, and her father said that he had spoken with the vet first, before putting Alice on the phone. Then they stared at each other some more. And then her mother got the same quizzical smile on her face that her father had. Alice beamed with delight, and put the phone back up to her mouth.

"Okay! Yes! I'll come and guess about your animals. I can come on...." She looked at her parents, who were both silently mouthing the word *Saturday*.

"I can come on Saturday!"

“Wonderful!” said the vet. “So put your father back on the phone so I can give him instructions for what to do so we can get you in to the hospital, since it’s usually off-limits to visitors.”

Alice gave her father the phone, and started dancing a wild and silly dance around the house, while her parents concentrated on the telephone instructions.

“I’m going to the zoo! Zoo, zoo, zoo, zoo, zooOOOooooo!!!!” she sang, as she spun around and around. Then she spread her arms like wings and flew from room to room, singing her zoo song.

Her parents caught her in the kitchen and sat her down. Her mother smiled, but she had a serious tone in her voice.

“Alice, I know how much you like to go to the zoo. But remember, this time, you’re going to be around sick animals. So it won’t be like a regular trip. You’ll have to act more grown-up and calm than when you go to the regular part of the zoo.”

Alice hadn’t thought about that yet. She plunked down in a kitchen chair and brushed hair out of her face.

“Oh, right. Sick animals. That’s kind of sad, but not really completely. Because they’re still animals and...and...and I can’t wait for Saturday!

## Chapter 21

When the family arrived at the front gate of the zoo, her father walked up to the ticket-seller and explained who they were. The ticket-seller picked up a phone and made a call.

“Please wait here, and a vet’s assistant will come for you in a few minutes.

Alice, of course, was impatient. She started bouncing up and down with excitement, and craning her neck to see if someone was coming from inside the zoo to get her.

“Remember, Alice, sick animals...” said her mother quietly.

“I know, but I’ve got wiggles anyway. I promise to be all calm and grown-up when the person comes.”

Her parents smiled, knowing she would keep her promise.

Soon a young woman came through the gate. She wore blue “scrubs” – top and bottom – just like people wore at people-hospitals. And she looked like she was just barely out of high school, which made Alice wonder if she could have a job like that in just a few years.

First she shook hands with Alice’s parents.

“Hi, my name is Jessica. I’m going to take you to the hospital.” Then she looked down.

“And you must be Alice! We’ve been waiting for you all morning!”

Alice held out her hand and shook Jessica’s, trying to be calm and grown-up. She had stopped bouncing, but she was still stretching up and down with her toes, so as she shook hands, she kept getting taller and shorter.

But Jessica didn’t let go. She took Alice’s hand and led the family through the gate. The grownups walked; Alice skipped.

They walked along some paths filled with visitors, but then suddenly turned onto a path marked “Zoo Personnel Only” – although no visitor would probably want to take that path, since it seemed to go behind some buildings, away from the animal exhibits.

After a bit more walking, they reached a plain-looking building with a simple sign over the door: Infirmary. Alice sounded out the word, but it didn’t mean anything to her.

“I thought we were going to a hospital for animals,” she said with a frown.

“This is it,” said Jessica, as she turned the door knob. “Only we call it an infirmary, because...well, I’m not sure why!”

As they passed through the doorway, Alice got hit in the nose with an odor that almost knocked her backward.

“*Ewwwww!!!* What’s that awful smell?”

Jessica laughed. “That awful smell is animals, plus disinfectant to kill germs. You’ll get used to it. We all do. Come on!”

## Chapter 22

Walking down the hallways of the infirmary, Alice really did forget about the odor. After all, there were so many fascinating sights – and sounds!

Some of the doors were open, and she could see all sorts of animals in little rooms. Of course, she had to walk quickly to keep up with Jessica, so she couldn't take in any whole animal through the doorways. She saw a large brown tail thumping on a table as she walked past one room, and the back of a hyena lying on its side in another room.

And as she walked, the air would suddenly be pierced by the call of an animal coming from who-knew-where in the building – a peacock, then a chimpanzee, then a sound that was something like a bark.

And then Alice walked by an open doorway and saw something that made her stop in her tracks. There on a large metal table lay a tiger, just a few feet away. It was quiet and magnificent and beautiful – and huge! And then it turned its head slowly and looked right at her!

Alice was fascinated, and terrified, all at once. She froze, unable to look away, staring at the tiger who was staring back at her. Then there was a hand on her shoulder, and she jumped in shock.

“Alice, she's a beauty, isn't she?” It was Jessica, who didn't seem at all frightened at having a huge and powerful tiger so close. “Don't worry, she's still very, very sleepy from the tranquilizers we gave her. We had to fix up a nasty cut on her paw.”

Then Alice noticed the bandage on the tiger's front paw. And she knew that she was safe.

Jessica pulled Alice away gently. “Let's turn the corner over here and meet Dr. Hastings.”

They walked a few feet and turned left. There in the hallway was a tall gray-haired man in a long white coat, talking with two young men in blue scrubs. When the guests approached, he excused himself and turned to greet them.

“Hello, I'm Dr. Hastings. You're Alice, of course, and you brought your parents. Good to see you all!”

He shook hands with Alice first, then with her parents. Jessica slid quietly away to another part of the infirmary.

After the short greetings, Dr. Hastings came to the point. “Folks, we're pretty busy here, so we don't have much time for chit-chat. Alice, I wanted you to come because we have a couple of cases that we can't solve. Can you and your parents come with me?”

Before anyone could answer, he started walking away. Alice stood still, puzzled at the man's abrupt nature. She looked at her parents to see what she should do next. Her father seemed to realize what was going on.

“I guess we follow him. Quick, he's got long legs and he moves fast!”

The three guests burst into motion, following the long white coat as it turned a corner up ahead. When they caught up with him, he was standing in a doorway, obviously waiting for them.

“Okay Alice, here’s the first case. This chimp has red bumps on him. They aren’t spider bites, they aren’t from a poisonous plant, and they aren’t from the food he eats, because no other chimp has the bumps. And he doesn’t have any disease like measles or eczema. In fact, he acts pretty healthy. So what’s your guess about his condition?”

Alice was impressed and even a little confused by having a doctor talk to her like that. She wasn’t used to having to use words like “case” or “condition.” And what was *eck-zim-mah* anyway? But then she realized that she didn’t have to know everything, and she didn’t have to use doctor kinds of words. All she had to do was the thing that she was good at.

“Well, I *guess*...he’s allergic to something that visitors give him to eat.”

Dr. Hastings smashed his palm against his forehead. “Of course! That must be it! But what is he getting so regularly that the bumps don’t go away?” He was really talking to himself, but Alice took the question as if he had asked her.

“Well, I *guess*...it’s something people buy to feed other animals, like peanuts.”

Dr. Hastings had been staring into space, thinking hard for himself, but when he heard Alice say the words “other animals” and “peanuts” he suddenly looked down at the girl who was looking up at him.

“Right! Something they sell all the time around here, like peanuts!”

Alice felt really good, and waited for Dr. Hastings to thank her. But instead, the man stopped a young woman in blue scrubs walking by and started giving orders to her.

“I want a full food allergy screen for this chimp right away! And I especially want him tested for all the foods they sell here at the zoo, especially the ones for feeding animals!”

The young woman seemed to be used to being stopped and given new orders, and she nodded and hurried off in a new direction.

Then Dr. Hastings turned and looked down at Alice. “Thanks, Alice, you’ve given us a big clue about this case. I’m impressed. Let’s go on to the next one.”

And with that, he started walking away again, as quickly as ever. Alice and her parents darted after him.

## Chapter 23

Dr. Hastings stopped at a doorway and started talking before the family quite caught up to him. “This potbelly pig has digestive trouble, but we don’t know why. It just won’t eat! But it will drink very soft food, just not very much. We’ve run all sorts of tests, and we’ve even sent a camera down into its stomach, but we haven’t found any solution.”

Alice heard the whole speech, but she was nearly breathless from running. “I *guess*... (whew!)...I *guess*...there’s something in its stomach.”

Dr. Hastings spoke a little sharply. “Alice, didn’t you hear me? I said we sent a camera down there and saw nothing.”

Alice finally caught her breath and repeated herself with confidence. “I *guess* there’s something down in the stomach you haven’t seen yet.”

Dr. Hastings looked down at her, wondering what to think. He wasn’t used to anyone being stubborn toward him. But he remembered Alice’s guess about the chimp, and he remembered his manners.

“Okay, Alice, we’ll take your guess and send a camera down again.” And with that, he reached out a long arm and grabbed another blue-scrub assistant who was walking by and gave some orders.

The assistant ran off, then came back in a minute rolling a strange box on a cart – with a long tube attached.

“Okay,” said Dr. Hastings. “Let’s get this pig sedated and send the camera down again.”

A second assistant came along, and the three professionals entered the room where the pig lay quietly. Alice and her parents stayed in the hallway by the door, peering in.

“Alice, come on in and watch the image we’re getting from the camera.”

Alice came into the room and stood by Dr. Hastings, who was sitting on a stool by a little black-and-white television set. Her parents slid into the room and stood by the wall, to stay out of the way. But they were able to see the television screen.

Soon the assistants had the pig sedated and they started pushing the tube down its throat. Dr. Hastings pushed some buttons and flipped a switch, and suddenly the screen lit up with a moving image.

“Now Alice, watch the monitor with me and tell me if you see anything that looks like it doesn’t belong.”

Alice decided that *screen* and *monitor* must mean the same thing – just like with a computer. So she stared at the image as hard as she could to find something odd, although it *all* looked odd to her. She could tell the camera was traveling down the back of the throat, and then down the esophagus. It looked like traveling through a soft tunnel!

And then the image changed. “This must be the pig’s stomach – like a big cave,” thought Alice.

Dr. Hastings fiddled with some things and the image started rotating, showing the cave of the stomach from all angles.

“Look, Alice, there’s nothing to see. Have we wasted our time here?”

Alice started to doubt herself. So she made a guess. “I *guess*...I *guess* you should make the camera go lower.”

Dr. Hastings frowned. “Lower? I don’t want to scratch the lining of the stomach with this camera. It could cause some damage.”

Alice trusted her guess and whispered emphatically, “*Lower!*”

“Okay, but just a little.” And Dr. Hastings watched the monitor carefully while he steered the camera with his dials.

And then the image wobbled. The camera had bumped into something!

Dr. Hastings was shocked. “Whoa! We hit something! But nothing is showing up on the monitor. How could that be?”

Alice trusted herself again. “I *guess*...because it’s clear.”

Dr. Hastings held his hands steady while he turned to look at Alice. He slowly repeated her words. “Clear...yes, clear...” And he just kept staring at her for the longest time.

Then it seemed as if he woke up and started talking in his regular voice of authority. “Okay everyone, we’ve got our answer – probably a piece of glass. Let’s open the claw to grab this thing sitting on the floor of the stomach. You there – hold the pig tightly. I don’t want even a hair to move while I do this. The glass could be sharp, and I don’t want the claw to bump it and accidentally cut the stomach wall.”

Everyone moved into new positions while Dr. Hastings flipped a switch and the camera showed a little claw out ahead. Alice was reminded of the claws in the clear booths in amusement parks, those booths with prizes piled up at the bottom. People would try to get the claw to pick up a prize, but it hardly ever could get a good one before time was up. Of course, this was different. This prize was invisible!

“Okay, folks, this might take a while, because I’m going to go very slowly. Even if the glass doesn’t puncture the stomach, it could scratch the esophagus or the throat on the way up.”

Alice closed her eyes and made one last guess before Dr. Hastings began. In a whisper, she told him, “I *guess*...not glass, but crystal.”

The doctor took one last look at her before proceeding. “Well, I’m going to treat it like sharp glass, just in case.” Then he turned to his knobs and dials and said no more. He was after a delicate prize.

But, of course, the real prize wasn’t the thing they were trying to remove. No, the real prize was having a healthy pig again!

## Chapter 24

When the claw had grabbed the invisible thing and the camera had been lifted back up and out of the pig's mouth, everyone was finally able to see what it was. Sure enough, it was a crystal – a piece of quartz crystal – with the sharp edges filed smooth. It was something that someone might wear around the neck, except there was no necklace attached.

Dr. Hastings was not happy at what he saw. “A visitor would never throw this sort of thing into the pig enclosure. This must come from a zoo employee, probably someone who was in the enclosure to feed the pig or prune bushes or trees there. It must have fallen off a necklace, or maybe the necklace got tangled in some tree branches pulled off the crystal.” His voice was getting louder and tenser. “Well, no matter how it happened, it *shouldn't* have happened. Zoo employees should know better than to wear such things, and when I find out who left this in the pig enclosure, someone is going to get fired!”

All the vet assistants kept quiet. They knew the doctor was right, and they knew that when he was upset, it was not even a good idea to agree with him. So everyone just kept on doing what needed to be done, then clearing out of the room.

Of course, Alice didn't know about staying quiet while Dr. Hastings was worked up like that. But she did feel a need to be careful.

“I *guess*...” she said timidly, “it wasn't anyone who worked here, and not a regular visitor, either.”

Dr. Hastings whipped around on his stool and glared at Alice.

“Well,” he said, trying to be calm and polite, but his voice still tense, “if it wasn't a worker and not a ‘regular’ visitor – whatever that means – then where did this crystal come from?!”

Alice was feeling a bit scared now, too scared to guess. She just stared at him and shrugged her shoulders.

Alice's father reached over and pulled his daughter close to him by the wall. He didn't like the way Dr. Hastings was treating Alice, as if she was responsible for the problem or the solution.

And just at that moment, Jessica burst into the room. “Oh my gosh, Dr. Hastings! I heard about the crystal, and I just remembered something.”

Dr. Hastings looked up at the young woman from his stool. He was frowning, because he just knew she was about to confess to being the one who caused all this mess with some stupid piece of jewelry.

“Dr. Hastings, do you remember last week when we had Bring Your Child to Work Day? And do you remember that you brought your little girl and her cousin? And remember how you got really busy and told me to take the two girls on a tour outside the infirmary?”

“Yes, I remember,” said the doctor testily. He was getting impatient, waiting for Jessica to admit her mistake.

“Well, I took them around to places that most visitors don't get to see, like the kitchen. And we walked around while food was being prepared for different animals. And when we left the building, the two girls started whispering to each other. When I asked them what the secret was,

they wouldn't tell me, but the cousin kept fiddling with her string necklace, like there was something wrong with it. Now I think she lost the jewel off her necklace – like the crystal.”

Dr. Hastings sat silently and slumped a little on his stool. There was no one around to blame, after all. He had brought the girls to work, then he had turned them over to someone else. And he had not gone over any rules with the cousin about what not to wear – rules that his own daughter knew from years before. No, if there was anyone to blame for a pig with a crystal in its stomach, it was Dr. Charles Hastings himself.

Then he looked over at Alice and her parents. She was looking bewildered, and the parents were looking peeved. He knew what he had to do.

“Alice, I'm sorry about the way I spoke to you. You were right about everything – even the part about it not being a regular visitor. And I think I've asked you enough favors and guesses for the day. Jessica, would you like to give Alice and her parents a tour like you gave my girls, and let them see all the things that go on behind the scenes at the zoo?”

Hearing those words, Alice felt all bouncy again. An afternoon with Jessica and her parents and getting to see how a zoo works! What could be better? She guessed...nothing at all!

# PART 3

## **Alice Gets to Travel and Help Grownups**

## Chapter 25

Alice had a guessing talent that made her very different from the rest of us. But there was something about her that was just like all of us: she liked sweets! And she especially liked cakes with lots of icing and fruit pies with lots of gooey filling.

So imagine her surprise when the president of a bakery sent her a letter! Actually, it wasn't just any bakery, and not even a local one. No, it was a *national* bakery, with little cakes and cupcakes that showed up on supermarket shelves. How did she know? Because as much as her parents liked sweets, too, they didn't have much time to make them in the family kitchen. So every once in a while, they brought home a store-bought treat – like Wilson's Apple Delight, in the bright blue and white box.

And this letter Alice held in her hand was from the Wilson Bakery headquarters in New York!

And the letterhead at the top showed that it came from the president of the bakery, William M. Wilson!

Alice read the letter out loud at the kitchen table, with both her parents listening in wonder.

Dear Ms. Westwright:

It has come to my attention that you have an unusual guessing ability. I am hoping you might use your gift to help me create new and tasty products in my test kitchen.

I will call you next Friday evening to discuss this with you and your parents. If you can help me, I will gladly pay you for your time and talent. Perhaps it can be money for your family or for your college fund.

Sincerely,  
William Wilson

Alice had a puzzled look on her face as she looked on the back of the letter to see if there was more to read. She looked up and saw that her parents had the same look on their faces.

Alice's mother spoke first. "How can your guessing help create new bakery goods? That doesn't make sense."

"No, it doesn't," chimed in her father. "He's either confused or he's not telling us everything he has in mind. Well, Alice, what do you think? Do you want to hear what the man has to say and maybe help him make new stuff we can eat?"

Alice, who had become quite confident about her guessing, did not hesitate. "Sure, I'll hear what he has to say. Maybe I can get him to put more icing on his cakes, or maybe..."

Her mother interrupted. "Whoa, there! He wants your guesses, not your advice. Isn't there supposed to be a difference?"

Alice blushed with embarrassment. "Right, there's a big difference. My guesses never come from what I want. It doesn't work that way. Actually, I don't know *how* it works!"

So they all agreed to drop the subject and wait for the phone call. But that didn't stop Alice from imagining all sorts of new pies and cakes in her spare time. And when she did that, it made her hungry. So she would go get an apple or some raisins out of the refrigerator. After all, she loved sweets, but she had enough sense to eat the *right* things – *most* of the time.

## Chapter 26

On Friday, the family had dinner as usual, and when it was over, Alice's father tiptoed mysteriously over to the coat closet and brought out a blue and white box. Aha! A Wilson dessert from the grocery store!

"Well, Alice, as long as we're waiting for Mr. Wilson to call, we might as well eat one of his cakes!"

Alice looked at the box. Apple cake! Apple cake? There must have been a mistake! There's apple pie, and there are all sorts of cakes in the world, but *apple* cake? Really?

"There's no such thing as apple cake!" she said with great sureness. Then she wasn't so sure. "Is there?"

Her father chuckled. "Indeed there is such a thing. And it's been around for a hundred years, I bet. You've just never had one."

Alice asked for a little piece, in case she didn't like it. After a taste, she decided she did like it. "Is it okay to have another little piece after this one?"

Her parents laughed. They were ready for that question. After all, who wouldn't like apple cake? And Alice got her second piece without any discussion.

When the leftover cake was put away, the family looked at each other. No phone call yet. They moved into the living room and pulled out a board game to play. Still no call. After playing the game twice, Alice's father looked at the clock and frowned.

"You know, it's getting close to your bedtime, young lady – call or no call."

Alice knew he was right, and she started putting the game pieces back in the box.

And that's when the phone rang.

Alice ran to the phone, then stopped and stood next to it. She waited there, as her mother walked over and answered the call.

"Yes, this is the Westwright home. Yes, this is Mrs. Westwright. Yes, Alice is here."

Her mother held the phone away and explained to the others. "That must have been Mr. Wilson's secretary. Now that she knows we're here, she's going to put him on the phone."

Alice started her up-and-down bouncing on her toes, and her father joined the other two by the phone. Alice's mother heard a voice coming over the phone, so she put it back up to her ear.

"Yes, hello Mr. Wilson. We just had your apple cake for dessert tonight. Yes, it was delicious, and it was the first time Alice had tasted it. She loved it, too. Yes, she's here, but before I put her on the phone, can you tell me what you have in mind?"

Alice's mother listened and nodded, listened and nodded, as if she was being told a lot of information. "Okay, I'll get Alice in a moment."

Then she covered the mouthpiece and told Alice and her father, "He said a lot of words, but really, he doesn't want to give any details. It's like a big mystery. But I've got an idea."

She put the phone back to her mouth and said, "Mr. Wilson, I'm going to turn on the speakerphone so my husband and I can hear your conversation with Alice. No, there is no one

else here, just the three of us. Yes, the windows are closed. No one out on the street could hear us.”

The three Westwrights looked at each other in wonder. What kinds of secrets was this man trying to hide? Who in the world would want to know the secrets of a baker, anyway?

With a push of a button, the speakerphone was on.

Alice’s mother continued. “Alright, Mr. Wilson, you’re on speakerphone now, and here’s Alice.”

Alice figured it was time to introduce herself. “Hello, Mr. Wilson. I’m Alice.”

A gravel-y voice came through the speaker. “Hello, Alice, I’m William Wilson. Now Alice, I told you some things in my letter about creating new products. I can’t tell you any more than that, because we have to keep our recipes a secret here, especially the recipes we’re creating in our test kitchen. So before I say anymore, I need you and your family to promise that you won’t ever talk about this conversation to another person – whether you agree to help me or not. Can you all do that now?”

Again the family looked at each other and shrugged their shoulders.

“Yes”

“Yes”

“Sure”

There was a pause, then the gravel-y voice began again. “Alright, then, here’s what’s going on. Here in our test kitchen, we are always trying out new recipes. Recently, we, uh, got a recipe from a, uh, new source, and we want to make it better than the original.” He paused for a long time, as if he wasn’t sure what to say next.

“Alright, let me be honest. This recipe we got was from our biggest competitor, another national bakery. And, well, we sort of stole the recipe. Now, that doesn’t make us criminals. This sort of thing happens all the time! They steal from us, we steal from them. Not a big deal.”

Alice looked up at her parents. Not a big deal to steal from each other? Did this happen a lot in the grownup world? She wanted to ask out loud, but instead she just gave a look that showed that she didn’t like this idea very much.

The voice went on: “So now we have their recipe for a cream cake, and we’re coming up with ideas to make it better than theirs. But here’s the catch: We have a sneaking suspicion that the only reason we were able to get the recipe so easily is because they are about to change it themselves! So you see the problem? If we improve their recipe, and *they* improve their recipe, we might not have a better cake than them!”

Nobody in the family knew what to think or say to all that. Finally, Alice’s father spoke.

“Mr. Wilson, this sounds like what the lawyers call *corporate espionage* – spying on each other’s companies. Why would we want our daughter getting involved in that sort of thing?”

Mr. Wilson seemed to be prepared for that. “I said it’s the sort of thing that happens all the time in our business. I can’t tell you why or how, but trust me, both companies are doing fine. No one is going to go broke because of our little spy game. In fact, it’s you the customer who

will come out best of all, because our spy game keeps us on our toes, always improving to get our desserts better.”

Alice’s father did not answer, so Mr. Wilson continued.

“Let me give you an example. You know that apple cake you had tonight? It took us over two years to get a good recipe. But our competitor beat us to it! They came out with an apple cake a few months before ours did, and it tasted almost exactly the same as ours! So we had to make some quick changes to guarantee it would be a little different from theirs, before we put it on grocery shelves. Now our apple cake sells well, but so does theirs. Do you see how harmless this game is?”

Alice’s father was not completely convinced, but he could see the point. “Alright, let’s say that we don’t really agree with your methods, but as long as no one is getting hurt, I’ll let you talk to Alice.”

The voice came back. “Great! I just have one question for you, Alice. Are you ready?”

“Yes, I’m ready.”

“Good. Here’s my question: Can you guess how they are going to change their cream cake recipe to make it better?”

## Chapter 27

Alice's mother interrupted before her daughter could say anything next. "Mr. Wilson, I'm going to stop Alice from making her guess – for now. Can you call back tomorrow at the same time?"

There was silence on the phone. Then Mr. Wilson spoke. "Well, alright, I'll wait. Just make sure you all keep your promise about not talking to anyone."

"We will keep our promise, and we'll speak again tomorrow night. Good-bye, Mr. Wilson." And with that, Alice's mother ended the call.

Alice and her father looked at her. She had a smile on her face, a smile that said she had a plan.

"Probably Mr. Wilson was telling the truth. But just in case, shouldn't we do our own detective work and check out *how* true his story is?"

Such a reasonable plan! Of course it would be wise to check some of Mr. Wilson's claims before helping him. Who was this competitor that he kept talking about? Which company was it? And was it really doing fine, or was it about to go broke because of the spies that Mr. Wilson hired all the time?

So the family decided to do an Internet search, trying to answer those questions. And they had all day Saturday to find the answers....

## Chapter 28

On Saturday, the family sat down and wrote out their questions. This was how they prepared for their detective work. The list looked like this:

- What bakery is the biggest competition to Mr. Wilson's baker?
- Do they sell similar products?
- Do the two companies make about the same amount of money?
- Is there a way to find out when they introduced each of their products, so you could tell if their competition and spying was equal?

With that list, they took turns finding the answers. And this is what they found out after the first hour:

The main competitor was Wally's Wonders. Its headquarters were in San Francisco. Wally's Wonders was just as old as Wilson's Bakery Company.

After the second hour, they had learned these things:

Wally's Wonders sold almost exactly the same products as Wilson's Bakery Company.

The two companies put their products in just about the same number of grocery stores around the country. One had more business in the eastern part of the country, and the other had more business in the western part. But there were many states that had both company's products on the grocery shelves.

After the third hour, they had learned that both companies were making good profits and had good customer reviews.

So even with all the spying, it seemed that the two companies were in good shape. But it was rather mysterious that they both created almost exactly the same products! Were they spying on each other so much that they never had any new ideas of their own?

Alice's father concluded that it would be alright for Alice to answer Mr. Wilson's question with a guess.

"Wait!" said Alice's mother. "Before I am completely comfortable letting Alice do this, I want to know one more thing. We know who we're helping, but who are we competing with? Sure, we say Wally's Wonders, but who is that, really?" So she went back to the Wally's Wonders website, and clicked on a tab labeled All About Us.

Alice's father objected. "I've already read that page. That's where I found out how old the company is and where the headquarters are."

"Well, I'm going to look again," her mother said simply, as she scrolled down the page. "Aha! Look, here's something you might have missed." And she pointed to some words at the very

bottom of the page: A Word from Our Founder and President. She clicked on those words, and up came a new page, which she read aloud:

Greetings, friends and customers! I hope you enjoy our products as much as we enjoy making them. I've been making delicious foods for many years, and I just want to make you happy with every purchase you make. So whether you prefer our cakes or our pies or our cupcakes, I want you to know that I have tested every recipe personally, and if I like what I tasted, I figure you will too!

"Very nice," said her father. "But not that different from what we found on the Wilson Bakery website."

Then Alice's mother sat very still and pointed to the words under the message. The others leaned over to see what she was pointing at. It was the closing words:

Your friendly and faithful Founder and President,  
Wallace 'Wally' Wilson

The three detectives looked at each other, their mouths open but no sound coming out. Wally's Wonders was run by a Mr. Wilson!

## Chapter 29

William Wilson, President of Wilson Bakery. Wallace Wilson, President of Wally's Wonders. Something very strange was going on!

Alice's mother broke the silence. "It's Saturday, and the place might be closed, but why don't we call up Wally's Wonders and see if the president is in?"

Alice was alarmed. "But Mom! We promised we wouldn't tell about talking with Mr. Wilson – *that* Mr. Wilson."

Her mother reassured her. "Don't worry, Alice. I won't say a word about our phone conversation – at least not until I find out who Wallace Wilson is!"

She found the phone number on another page and made the call. And she turned on the speakerphone. After a few rings, someone picked up at the other end.

"Wally's Wonders! How can I help you?"

Alice's mother took a breath. "Well, I know it's Saturday, but I wonder if Mr. Wilson is in his office and could take a call."

"May I ask who is calling, and the nature of your call?"

Alice's mother hesitated. "I may have some information about corporate espionage going on in the bakery industry. So I can only talk to your president – no one else." She was trying to sound very professional, even if she didn't really know what she was talking about.

The voice on the other end kept calm. "Alright. I'll ring Mr. Wilson and see if he can take your call."

While waiting, Alice's mother giggled with victory. She had got through by sounding very knowledgeable and self-assured. Her husband patted her on the back to congratulate her, and Alice imitated him.

"Hello, this is Wallace Wilson. To whom am I speaking?"

He had taken the call. And his voice was gravel-y!

## Chapter 30

“My name is Elizabeth Westwright, and I am investigating some claims that bakery companies like yours are being spied on.”

“Well, Ms. Westwright, are you part of the police or the FBI? Or are you a reporter looking for a story to write about?”

Alice’s mother hesitated, not knowing the best way to explain herself and why she was calling. But it didn’t matter. Before she could speak, the voice on the phone started talking again.

“Westwright... Westwright.... Where did I see that name? Hold on, hold on, I remember. Ms. Westwright, you have a daughter, don’t you? Let’s see, a kind of famous daughter, isn’t she? Oh, yes, I remember. There was a little story the other day that was circulating around. Your daughter is the one who guesses everything right. And they call her.... Oh, yes, now I remember. They call her Alice Guess-Right!”

When Alice heard that, she immediately thought of her friend Rebecca. Had Rebecca been talking to reporters, who put her story in the paper? No, that couldn’t have happened, because then her parents would have seen the story, and neighbors would have talked about it around town.

But Rebecca was a tricky and clever girl. She wrote things on the Internet, and even though she only wrote to other kids, kids show what they read to their parents, and one of those parents might be a reporter....

“Ms. Westwright, let me do some guessing here, instead of your daughter. I’m going to guess that you were contacted by the Wilson Bakery Company, by none other than William Wilson himself. And I’m guessing that he wanted to enlist your daughter to do some guessing that would give his company an advantage over mine. And I’m guessing that you didn’t trust him completely, and you did some investigating and found me and my company. *And* I’m guessing that he made you promise not to tell anyone that he’s trying to make a deal with you and your daughter. Does that sound about right? Is that what old Willy is up to these days?”

Alice and her parents were struck speechless. This Wallace Wilson seemed to be able to read their minds. No, it seemed that he could read William Wilson’s mind!

“Ms. Westwright, since you’re not answering me, I suppose it’s because my guesses are all exactly on target. Now, don’t worry, I’m not upset, and I’m not going to call the police or the FBI or anyone else to report this. In fact, I think the whole thing is kind of cute – funny, really. William sure does come up with some crazy ways to beat me at the game. It’s been going on for a long, long time. See, William is my brother!”

## Chapter 31

Now it was Alice's mother's turn to speak. "Mr. Wilson, I'm so sorry that we've gotten involved in this "game" you have with your brother. And by the way, I've got my speakerphone on, so my husband and my daughter are listening to all of this."

Mr. Wilson shouted, "Well, hello, Mr. Westwright! And hello to you, Alice! Good to meet you! Now look, I don't want you folks to feel odd about getting involved. William and I have been competing since forever. It's part of the reason we ended up on opposite ends of the country! But let's make things fair, okay? Why don't you tell me what he wants Alice to guess? I won't tell you if she guesses right or not. In fact, I don't really care if she guesses right or not. But I might have something to say about the question that William wants an answer to."

Alice's mother looked at the other two, and they shrugged the shoulders. Now that one Mr. Wilson had guessed what the other Mr. Wilson was up to, why not tell him everything?

"Alright, Mr. Wilson. What your brother wants Alice to guess is how you are going to change your cream cake recipe."

Mr. Wilson laughed loud and long. Finally he said, "I knew it! I knew it! He took my bait. I let him steal that old recipe, and he figured out that I let him. And he even figured out that I let him because I was about to change it. Good for old Willy! He's a sharp one!"

"Well, now I'm going to tell you folks a secret. I'm planning to make a change in the cream cake recipe to make it better. But I haven't figured out how yet. So I let him steal the cream cake recipe just so *he* would change it. And then I was going to steal it back with his new ingredients!

"So you see, if Alice guesses what the new ingredients will be, she'll only be telling him what he would do in his own test kitchen, not what I've been doing in my kitchen, because I haven't done anything – at least not yet! And when I steal it back, I'll just add another secret ingredient anyway, just so mine will be different from his. So Alice, guess away! And whatever you guess, he'll do, and then I'll do it, too, plus something more that he *won't* know about! So he can't possibly win this time!"

Alice whispered to her father, "Did you get all that? Can you explain it to me after Mom hangs up?"

Her father looked at her and nodded. But secretly, he wasn't sure he understood it all, either.

## Chapter 32

Later that Saturday afternoon, Alice came into the kitchen and found her father playing with little white index cards.

“Dad, is that a new game for Family Night? Can you teach me?”

“No, it’s not a game. It’s my way of showing myself and you how Wallace is going to trick his brother William over the cream cake recipe. Are you ready to watch?”

“Yes! I can’t wait to see how it works!”

“Okay, let’s start with Card One. On this card, I’ve written a make-believe recipe for cream cake. It’s got flour and eggs and cream and vanilla. Those seem like the right kinds of ingredients, don’t you think?”

Alice thought a moment. “Sure, those things might make a cream cake.”

“Okay,” her father continued. “Now let’s say that this is the Wally’s Wonder recipe, but Wally, or Wallace, is thinking about making it better. But he can’t come up with a good idea. So he lets William steal a copy of it.”

Now Alice’s father pulled out another card. “Here is Card Two, and it has the same list of ingredients as Card One. Card One is in Wally’s hands in San Francisco, and Card Two has mysteriously shown up far away in New York.”

He put the two cards at opposite ends of the kitchen table.

“Now William in New York goes into his test kitchen and experiments over and over. Finally, he comes up with a perfect new ingredient and adds it to the list on Card Two.”

Alice interrupted, “But what about my guess – before he even goes into the test kitchen.”

Her father smacked his forehead. “Oh, right, your guess! Okay, let me change the story a bit. He gets Card Two from a spy, and he calls you on the phone – tonight! Now let’s say you guess *nutmeg*. Then he goes to Card Two and adds nutmeg to the list of ingredients. All he has to do is go to his test kitchen and figure out how much nutmeg will make the cream cake better.”

Alice interrupted again. “What if I don’t say anything? Remember, the San Francisco Mr. Wilson said he hasn’t come up with a new ingredient, so my guess might be *nothing*! Then what will New York Mr. Wilson do?”

Alice’s father stared at the cards and shook his head. “If you say the word *nothing* for your guess, then.... Wait, let me think.... If you say *nothing*, then the New York Mr. Wilson – William – will know that his brother Wallace is tricking him into coming up with a new ingredient. He’ll know that Wallace hasn’t changed the recipe yet. He’ll figure out that Wallace is waiting for William to do all the work, and that Wallace will probably steal the new recipe back for *his* company!”

Then Alice guessed the rest. “So if William adds something to Card Two, like nutmeg, and Wallace gets a copy of Card Two, which is Card Three, then he can see to add nutmeg to his cream cake, too, so it will be just like William’s. And then he can add one more secret ingredient to the list to make it even better, like chocolate!”

Her father laughed. “Yes, that’s the idea! Only I don’t think chocolate would be a very good secret ingredient. It’s kind of hard to hide!”

## Chapter 33

On Saturday night, the phone rang at the Westwright house, just as everyone expected. It was Mr. Wilson, the New York Mr. Wilson, Mr. William Wilson. The speakerphone was on, and they all heard the familiar rough voice.

“Well, Alice, are you ready to make your guess? I hope so. And I’ve got a big check I’m ready to send you in the mail. So guess what my competitor is planning to add to the cream cake recipe.”

Alice was ready. “Mr. Wilson, I *guess*...the new ingredient is a whole lot of Willy-Wally!”

There was silence at the other end. Then the voice came through again, this time very slowly. “Alice, did you say *Willy-Wally*?”

“Yes, that’s my guess. But I don’t know what that means.”

There was silence again. Then the voice: “Mr. and Mrs. Westwright, did you break your promise to me? Have you talked to someone about our conversation last night?”

Alice’s mother spoke up. “Mr. Wilson, we did some research to find out about your competitor. And when we found out who it was, *he* told *us* all about last night’s conversation! He guessed exactly what you were up to. So we kept our promise. But evidently, you can’t hide much from *your brother*.”

Again there was silence, then the sound of Mr. William Wilson exhaling a lot of air, like a deflating balloon.

His voice sounded quieter, more defeated. “No, I can’t hide much from him. You know, back years ago, before we started competing with each other, we used to play tricks on other kids. We could trick them out of their lunch money or their show-and-tell treasures. We got quite a reputation. The other kids would tease our victims by saying they had traded their stuff for a whole lot of Willy-Wally – meaning they got nothing but tricked by the Wilson brothers.”

He paused for a moment, then continued. “And for these last several years, we’ve been trying to trade each other a whole lot of Willy-Wally, trying to get something for nothing – trying to get secrets from each other instead trying completely new things in our test kitchens. So Alice, your guess tells me he’s waiting for *me* to change the cream cake recipe so *he* can steal it back. And I bet he told you – even bragged – that once he stole it, he would add another secret ingredient. Am I right?”

Alice was amazed. These men sure did think alike! How was that possible?

“You see, Alice, we’re not just brothers. We’re twins.”

## Chapter 34

What Alice did next had nothing to do with her guessing talent. And it had nothing to do with how she was raised to always speak politely to grownups. And it had nothing to do with her normal personality.

She got angry. Really, really angry.

And she sent her anger over the speakerphone, while her stunned parents watched and listened to their daughter transform into another person.

“Mr. Wilson, you and your brother are just a couple of bullies – and babies! You sounded so nice on the phone last night. But now I can tell you aren’t nice at all! And neither is your brother! You’re just a couple of...of...Willy-Wally babies who can’t get along with anybody, not even with each other! And you tried to trick me into helping you, just so you could be mean to your brother. Why don’t you just...just...”

Her parents were afraid she was going to say something really awful next, and her father reached over to end the call before she finished her sentence. But she pulled the phone away to keep him from taking it.

“...just...*talk to him!* Like a grownup! Like two grown men are supposed to! And leave me out of it!”

Alice’s parents were relieved that she had said something very appropriate, even wise. They waited for Mr. Wilson’s response.

His voice was quieter than ever. “Alice, you’re right. We need to talk. But I don’t think we can leave you out of it. You’re the only one who can make sure we don’t try to trick each other. Can you see that? You can guess whether we’re telling the truth and the whole truth to each other. So will you help us?”

Alice was calmer now, and a bit confused. “But you’re in New York, and your brother is in San Francisco, and I’m here. How can I help?”

“Alice, here’s an idea. I want you to pick a place where we can meet, so neither of us will feel at an advantage. When you choose, call me and my brother and tell us where to go. And we’ll each pay half of the expenses for your whole family to join us there. Then you can sit with us and make sure we stay honest with each other. Does that seem fair to you and your parents?”

Mother, father, and daughter looked at each other. They all seemed to say a silent *Why not?* So they agreed to Mr. Wilson’s plan, with a promise to call back in a few days.

## Chapter 35

Alice got busy, looking at maps and other information. Between New York and San Francisco, there were a lot of choices. But only two big cities were close to halfway between the east coast and west coast, just to be fair. Those cities were Kansas City and St. Louis.

Now Alice only had to choose between two destinations. But remember how the family had wanted to take a vacation? Alice remembered! So when she went to investigate which city should have the meeting, she became a bit selfish. She wanted to go where she and her parents could have an adventure!

So she read about the cities. Then she looked for pictures of the cities. And there was her answer: a picture from St. Louis showing a tall arch along the wide Mississippi River! When she read about the arch, she found something really adventurous: People could ride to the top and look out for miles and miles!

She ran to tell her parents of her decision to have the meeting in St. Louis. Her mother said it was a wonderful idea. But her father started singing!

“Meet me in St. Loueeee, Louie. Meet me at the fair...”

Alice stared, then covered her ears and started laughing. “Where did you get that song? It’s weird!”

“No, Alice, it’s not weird, it’s old. It was sung in a big movie way back in the 1940’s. But the song is actually even older, like from around 1900. Maybe someday I’ll make you watch the movie. It’s got songs and romance and kissing. You’ll love it!”

“*Yuck!*” was all Alice could say.

Her mother interrupted this exchange. “Never mind the movie and the song. Tell us why you chose St. Louis.”

So Alice pulled them over to the computer to look at the pictures of the arch and the river.

“See, wouldn’t that make a great a great family vacation? We could go up in the arch and take a boat on the big Mississippi River. And you could teach me all sorts of things about geography and history and stuff! And there’s a stadium for baseball and football, and there’s a big garden and a zoo and...”

“Okay, okay,” said her father. “You’re doing a good job of selling us on the idea. And it’s a great way to get a family vacation without having to pay for it! So....”

“Meet me in St. Loueee, Louie. Meet me at the fair...”

And this time, Alice didn’t cover her ears. She even tried to sing along, but giggled too much.

## Chapter 36

Alice looked out the window of the plane. This was already an adventure! Here they were, flying all the way to St. Louis, instead of driving somewhere close to home for a vacation. This was her very first plane trip, at least the first she could remember. Her parents told her she had been on a plane with them when she was an infant, but that didn't count.

Looking out the window was never boring. If she got tired of looking down at farm fields and towns and highways and empty land, she could look out at clouds. All sorts of clouds were just a little below the plane, like little cotton-y blankets. And the blankets seemed to spot the sky from here to forever....

Then a voice came over the speaker, telling everyone to get ready for landing in St. Louis! She woke up her mother, sitting next to her, to tell her the news. Her mother woke her father next to her. And soon they arrived.

Coming off the plane, they walked along airport hallways until they passed through some doors, where people were waiting for friends and relatives who had been on the plane. As they walked along, they saw a man holding a sign with the word *Westwright* on it. They walked over to the man and introduced themselves.

"We're the Westwrights," said Alice's father. The man smiled and introduced himself as Joseph, their driver. He took some of their luggage, to make it easier on the family, then led them outside.

"*Brrrrr!* It's cold in St. Louis!" exclaimed Alice.

Joseph smiled. "Well, it certainly is today! And it has been all week."

Now Alice understood why her parents made her take her heaviest winter jacket. They had done their own research and homework for this trip!

Alice zipped up her coat and asked, "Are you going to drive us around in a long, long limousine?"

Joseph laughed. "No, I'm going to drive you around in a small, practical van, but a very nice one with big windows to see out."

And soon they reached the van. Luggage was piled in, then people.

As the van drove away from the airport, Alice frowned with disappointment. "Where's the big city I saw in all the pictures?"

Joseph explained, "Miss Alice, the airport is not very close to the big city you're expecting. It's way out here in the far, far suburbs. But we're driving straight to the city right now. You'll see it soon."

So Alice put on her patient face and stared out the window. After all that time on the plane, she could wait a little longer. For one thing, she could see that it had been snowing recently: there were places where snow had been pushed into piles, out of the way of people and cars. But her brain kept nudging her into the city faster than the van could travel. She leaned forward in her seat.

"Joseph, will we see the arch soon? Can we go up in it?"

“You are already thinking about the arch and going way up there in the sky? Well, of course you’re going to do that, but maybe not today. But maybe you will see it from your hotel.”

In a while, they saw the buildings getting older and closer together. They were definitely coming into the city. And then Joseph came off the highway and into downtown city streets. As he turned one corner, Alice got her first glimpse of the arch in the distance.

“Wow! I saw it! I saw it! It’s not that far away!” She started bouncing in her seat, which was not easy with a seat belt holding her in.

Her mother put a hand on her shoulder. “Okay Alice, try to stay calm. We’ll get to the arch, but first we have to settle into the hotel.”

Then the van turned another corner and the arch disappeared. Alice had no choice but to be calm now. So she turned her brain to imagine living in a hotel for a few days. Vacations were tremendous fun!

## Chapter 37

Joseph took their luggage out of the van and put it all on a cart. Then he wheeled the cart into the hotel lobby, with the family walking behind. Joseph even went up to the long counter to announce their arrival. The hotel manager came out from behind the counter and welcomed the family. Alice was impressed, being treated almost like a celebrity.

The manager explained the situation. “A Mr. Wilson and another Mr. Wilson made special arrangements for you here. I’m sure you’ll like the room, and please let us know if there is anything we can do to make your stay pleasant. Remember, the two Mr. Wilsons are paying the bill, so just relax and enjoy yourselves!”

With that, he handed them their key. A hotel employee took the cart from Joseph and led the family to the elevator. As they were waiting for the elevator to arrive, Joseph handed Alice’s father a piece of paper.

“Give me a call at this number whenever you want to go somewhere – day or night. I’ll rush right over and take you. And if you run out of ideas of where to go, I’ll take you to places I know you’ll enjoy.”

They shook hands, then Joseph turned and left them. Soon the elevator arrived, and they went up in it.

And up.

And up.

“Looks like we’re going somewhere near the top!” exclaimed Alice’s father. “And it’s a pretty tall hotel!”

When they got off, the employee with the cart directed them down a hallway, all the way to the end. So that meant their room was going to be in a corner of the building, and they could look out in two directions.

And what a room it was. No, not a room, but a *suite* of rooms – three rooms in all. And when they pulled away the curtains, there was the arch, and the river next to it, glowing in the afternoon sun. They were so high, Alice thought she could reach out and touch the top of the arch. Adventure!

## Chapter 38

Alice's parents unpacked and relaxed a bit, but they realized they couldn't contain Alice and her excitement for the rest of the afternoon and evening.

Her father came into her room and saw her staring out the window. "Alice, would you like to call Joseph to come take us to the arch?"

"Oh, yes, yes, yes, yes!" And she started bouncing next to him while he handed her the phone and the piece of paper with the number on it.

She bounced as she dialed, and she bounced when Joseph answered. And she bounced while she asked.

"Joseph, this is Alice. Remember us? At the hotel? Can you come take us to the arch?"

Joseph laughed. "You do not waste any time, do you? Tell your parents to meet me outside in fifteen minutes. And please do not drag them. Let them walk on their own."

Alice laughed back and thanked him.

"What's all the laughing about?" asked her father.

"Oh, Joseph made me promise to let you and Mom walk to the van. I'm not allowed to be impatient and drag you downstairs. Oh, and you have fifteen minutes! Hurry!"

Because of Alice's insistence and impatience, they were all out on the sidewalk in ten minutes. When Joseph arrived, he hopped out of the van to speak with them.

"We could walk several blocks, or we could drive. What would you like?"

"I vote for driving," said Alice's mother. "It's awfully cold and windy."

"I agree," said her father.

"Which way will get us there faster?" asked Alice.

"Oh, Alice, have some feelings for you sickly old parents!" scolded her mother.

Alice replied, "You're not sickly and you're not old. But if you can't stand the cold, let's drive! Hurry!" And she was already climbing into the van.

Soon they were all in and buckled up. Joseph started the van and began driving through the city streets. He explained as he drove.

"Alice, you could say that downtown ends at the river. But really, St. Louis *begins* at the river. That's where it started many years ago. And now there is a park with the arch to mark the beginning of the city and the beginning of the country west of the Mississippi."

As excited as Alice was to travel up the arch, she enjoyed having things explained to her like this. And when her father added to what Joseph said, she enjoyed it more.

"See, Alice, back in those days, the Mississippi was the end of civilization, as far as most people were concerned. Anything west of it was wild territory, and California at the other end of the continent was more like a dream away, not a reality. So anyone who wanted to go west into the wild country would start in St. Louis. That's why they call this the Gateway Arch – the gateway to the western United States."

Alice was impressed. "So when I get to the top, can I see both the east and the west – where they came from and where they were going?"

Joseph answered. “Exactly! That’s the whole point of the arch. But of course, the arch doesn’t have a point!” Then he started laughing.

Alice was confused. “What? What do you mean a point and not a point?”

Her mother joined in. “Alice, Joseph was making a joke – a pun – with the word *point*. The arch has a reason, which is the same as saying it has a point. But an arch is curved, so it doesn’t have a point or a corner. Get it?”

Alice thought really hard for a moment. *Point* reason and *point* corner. Then she started laughing. “Hey, Joseph, that’s really good! That’s what I’ll tell everyone at school – like a riddle!”

## Chapter 39

Standing at the bottom of the arch was very different from seeing it from high up in the hotel. Alice felt dizzy looking up to the top, and almost fell over as she leaned back to stare. And the shine from sunlight striking the silver metal made her eyes water.

The family got tickets and climbed into a little tube-like compartment. Joseph waved good-bye to them as the door closed. Then the compartment started climbing – not exactly straight up like an elevator, but much steeper than an escalator would travel. Alice tried to imagine their tube compartment traveling the huge curve of the arch.

Alice was not disappointed at the top. She could look down to the Mississippi River and east into Illinois. But she imagined that if she squinted her eyes, she could see all the way to the Atlantic Ocean on the eastern edge of the continent, hundreds of miles away.

On the other side, she could look out across St. Louis and beyond into the west, where the sun was lowering toward the horizon. Here she imagined being able to follow the sunset all the way to California and the Pacific Ocean. She stayed on this side for a long time, dreaming in the golden haze of the late afternoon.

Her parents let her know it was time to leave, so Alice took one last look east, and one last look down to the river. As they got settled in their tube for the downward journey, her sense of adventure poked her again.

“Mom, Dad, I know it’s cold outside and getting dark, but can we go down to the river before we leave?”

Her parents looked at each other and shrugged. Why not?

“But not too long,” said her mother. “Maybe we can come back another day for a longer time at the river.”

“Yay!” was Alice’s response.

Joseph met them at the bottom. Alice told him that they wanted to go down to the river for a few minutes. Joseph looked at her parents’ tired faces.

“Okay, for a *few* minutes. Then it’s back to the hotel.”

The parents smiled with deep appreciation at his understanding.

They walked toward the river as the sun started to set behind them. When they got to the platform at the edge of the water, it was getting dark. Boats on the water turned on lights. And a whole city on the other side of the river sparkled with even more lights. There was something magical in the scene.

But what amazed Alice the most was the size of the river. That city on the other side seemed to be miles away, because of how wide the river was. She looked at the water near her feet just to make sure it was traveling south toward the Gulf of Mexico, and not lapping on the shore like water in a lake. No, it was really a huge flowing river, not a lake, and a barge the size of a supermarket passed by just to prove it. *The Mighty Mississippi* was a phrase she had heard once in a song or a movie, and now she understood what those words really meant.

A steam whistle on the barge and a clanging bell on a nearby boat woke Alice from her fantasy of water and lights and sunsets. Then she realized she was cold – and hungry. And she realized her parents probably were feeling those same things. She shivered and ran over to them and started dragging them toward the van, all while bouncing up and down on her toes.

## Chapter 40

The next morning, Alice was awakened by the phone ringing in the living room of the hotel suite. She jumped out of bed and ran to answer it. At home, she would not do such a thing, because her parents wanted to be the ones to answer. But here, she figured that the only person who would call would be Joseph, and her parents wouldn't mind if she answered to talk to him.

She picked up the phone and excitedly shouted, "Hello?!?"

But the voice on the other end was certainly *not* Joseph. It was a crisp, business-like voice, the voice of someone who was trained to be polite but not warm and friendly.

"Is this Alice Westwright? I am Mr. Wilson's assistant. He requires your presence downstairs in the lobby at nine o'clock this morning. Can I tell him that you confirm this?"

Alice wasn't used to hearing words and sentences put together like this, but she got the idea of what they meant. "Yes, I'll be there."

"Very good. I will tell Mr. Wilson," the voice said efficiently.

And then the voice changed to a whisper – like a mother whispering advice. "And honey, if I were you, I'd bring a coloring book or something to read, because it's going to be a long, boring morning!"

The call ended immediately, before Alice could say anything in return.

By now, her parents were standing in the doorway to their room, waiting to find out what the call was about. Alice put down the phone, disappointed. She had completely forgotten why she was in St. Louis, and was looking forward to a whole day of sightseeing – which wasn't going to happen now.

"That was someone calling for Mr. Wilson – I don't know which one. And I have to be downstairs at nine o'clock."

Alice's mother saw her daughter's sad face and tried to put a positive spin on the situation. "Well, it's good that they want to start early in the morning. Maybe that will mean we can do some fun things this afternoon."

Alice wasn't cheered. "The lady said to bring something to keep me busy, because it was going to be long and boring." She sighed. "I better get my library book when I go down."

And with that, she trudged back to her room to get ready for the meeting of Mr. Wilson and Mr. Wilson.

## Chapter 41

Alice and her parents climbed into the elevator shortly before nine. Alice pushed the L button, the door closed, and down they went. She thought to herself, “At least getting there is kind of fun.”

At the bottom, the door opened and there stood a woman in a black suit, her hair pulled back tight, holding a large notepad. She definitely looked like someone who would be good at taking orders and passing orders down to others. And not caring who ended up feeling miserable, Alice thought to herself.

The woman shook hands with both her parents and spoke to them in that flat, business-like way. “Hello, I’m Roberta, Mr. Wilson’s assistant. Let me show you to the meeting room where Alice will be this morning.”

Then she looked down at Alice and shook her hand while speaking. “Hello, Alice. Mr. Wilson and Mr. Wilson are expecting you. Just follow me.”

But before she started walking, she bent down close to Alice’s ear and whispered, “That book you’ve got there – I hope you’re just starting it or you’re a slow reader. You tell me if you run out of things to keep you occupied.”

Then Roberta turned and led the family down a hallway off the lobby. She stopped about halfway down the hall and opened a door. She motioned for the others to enter first. They did so, and when they were in, she also entered, and closed the door behind her.

Alice looked around. The room was large enough for a meeting with 30 or 40 people, but it was mostly empty. Only a long table stood in the middle of the room, with two chairs facing each other and a third chair at one end. Over along the wall, there was a long table filled with finger food – apple slices, orange juice, crackers, cheeses, and other snack items that a person could grab and eat without missing anything important at a meeting.

There was no sign of either Mr. Wilson.

Roberta spoke up. “Alice, your seat is the one at the end of the meeting table. Here is a snack table for you, anytime. And the restroom is just outside this door and across the hallway.”

Then she turned to the parents. “You may come and go as you please. However, there are no chairs for you. Mr. Wilson and Mr. Wilson do not want you to stay more than a few moments each time you come in. So you can get Alice’s attention from here and she can excuse herself to talk with you.”

Alice’s mother tried to speak, but Roberta interrupted. “You see, Mr. Wilson and Mr. Wilson do not want any adult to be here long enough to know what they are talking about. That is why you cannot stay. And please remember that if you call Alice away from the meeting, or if she goes to the restroom, the meeting will stop until she comes back to her seat. That is because....” She hesitated here, not able to find any business-like words to say. “...because they don’t trust each other unless Alice is nearby.”

The parents shrugged their shoulders, having nothing to say to Roberta. It seemed that everything had already been planned, and they had to go along with it.

“Mom, Dad, you won’t go do things without me, will you?” Alice asked with a little quiver in her voice.

Her father answered. “No, if we do anything, it will be something you wouldn’t enjoy anyway, like window shopping.”

Her mother had a different answer. “Here, Alice, take my phone and call your father’s phone if you need anything at all. We’ll probably be right here in the hotel, not out in the city.”

And then her father had to have the last word, with a twinkle in his eyes. “Of course, we might decide to go ride up the arch again, or take a boat out on the river....”

“Dad! Mom! You wouldn’t!” Alice shouted.

Her father replied with a chuckle, “No, we wouldn’t.” And he bent down to kiss her good-bye.

Then her mother kissed her, too, and then they left, leaving Alice with Roberta.

Roberta looked at Alice, who was feeling rather unsure of herself.

“Honey, when it’s just the two of us, we can be girlfriends. But when anyone else is around, especially those two men, I have to be all business. You understand?”

Alice understood, and nodded.

“Okay, so let’s load up a plate of goodies for you and plunk you down in your chair at the table. Then I can tell the gentlemen to come in. Can you believe that they have to make sure you’re here before they come to the table?”

Alice started putting fruit on her plate. She still wasn’t sure about her relationship with Roberta, but she couldn’t help but mumble, “They’re like two big babies!”

“Right you are, girl, two big babies!” Roberta flashed Alice a smile. “I think we’re going to be *good* girlfriends!”

When Alice was sitting at the end of the table with her book and her snack plate and a glass of juice, Roberta pulled out a phone and made a call. She was all business again.

“We are ready. You may send both gentlemen to the meeting now.” She ended the call, and then mumbled, “Babies!”

## Chapter 42

The two men entered the room, one behind the other. They certainly did look alike, but not exactly. They both had graying hair, but one's was thinner and combed back, while the other's was thicker and combed to the side. And they didn't dress the same way, either. The one with thin, combed back hair was dressed casually, wearing a shirt with large flowers on it and light-colored pants – as if he was on vacation. The one with hair combed to the side was wearing a dark suit, as if he was going to work in an office.

Alice tried to guess which one was which. Vacation Mr. Wilson seemed more relaxed, while Business Suit Mr. Wilson seemed more serious. If that was a clue, Alice couldn't tell what it meant. So she made a silent guess.

"Hello, Alice, it's good to meet you in person," said Office Suit as he sat down, in a gravelly and serious tone. But there was a little smile on his face.

*That's New York Mr. Wilson -- William,* Alice said to herself.

"Yes, hello Alice," said Vacation Shirt, as he sat down at the table. A big grin came over his face when he looked at her. But when he looked back at his brother, the smile faded.

*That's Wally from San Francisco,* Alice thought to herself.

The brothers did not introduce themselves to Alice, so she assumed her guesses were correct.

Roberta put some snacks on plates and poured some coffee. Then he brought these items to the table for each man. Walking over to where Alice was sitting, she leaned over and whispered in her ear.

"Alice, I'll be right outside the door in the hallway, if you need something. You get more snacks anytime you feel like it. Good luck, girlfriend, and spank those babies if they misbehave!"

Roberta smiled at Alice, then slipped out the door.

Business Suit William started the meeting with a speech that was meant for his brother and for Alice.

"Okay, let's review the rules we set up. We only speak when Alice is in the room. We can't interrupt each other. But when one of us finishes speaking, the other can ask Alice to guess if it was completely true or not. Agreed?"

"Agreed," replied Vacation Shirt Wally. "Good rules. They don't call you Wiggly Willy for nothing – always trying to wiggle out of the truth!"

Business Suit William scowled at his brother. "And they don't call you Wily Wally for no reason, either!"

The two brothers stared at each other for several seconds. Then Vacation Shirt Wally broke into laughter.

"Let's face it, Willy, we're not to be trusted – and especially by each other!"

Business Suit William smiled slightly at this remark.

Then Wally turned to Alice. "You know, we're going to be talking about business things and personal things. It really doesn't matter whether you understand or not, since your guesses seem

to be right no matter what. So go ahead and read or write or sleep, for all we care. Just remember we can interrupt you or wake you anytime to check on who is telling the truth.”

Alice nodded that she understood and agreed. She couldn't say anything, because her mouth was full with an orange slice.

So the meeting began.

## Chapter 43

“So, Willy, how’s the cream cake recipe coming along?” Wally asked with a smirk.

William jerked his head a bit, then hid his surprise. “Wouldn’t you like to know? Anyway, how do you know I’m working on improving the cream cake?”

Wally replied, “Oh, I don’t know, maybe because someone *stole* the recipe from my company recently?”

Willy was quick to answer that. “Gee, it’s too bad your recipe got stolen. Maybe you made it too *easy* to steal. Like maybe you *wanted* someone to steal it, so someone else could improve it for you when you stole it back.”

It was obvious that the brothers had caught each other on this latest bit of trickery, and the conversation seemed to end, with no more to say about the subject.

Then Wally started again. “Okay, so we know what each other has been up to. You’re a cheat and I’m a cheat. But you know what? While we’ve been doing all this cheating and spying and tricking, our businesses have not been growing at all. And other bakeries have been growing – with new recipes and new customers. So all our tricks are starting to make our businesses lose business!”

William frowned. “Yes, I agree. So what do we do about it?”

At this point, Alice tuned out. The brothers started talking about numbers and profits and their parents in the old days and about all sorts of other stuff she didn’t care about. She picked up her book and started reading. And reading. And reading. And reading....

“Alice!”

Alice looked up from her book. The brothers were both looking at her.

“What?” she asked, as if coming out of a dream.

William asked, “Is Wally answering my question truthfully, I mean completely truthfully?”

Alice had no idea what the question had been, or what Wally’s answer had been. But she figured she could give a guess-answer anyway.

“Well, I *guess*...not completely.”

“Aha, you little snake,” shouted William at his brother. “Now give me the *whole* answer!”

Alice went back to her book. She didn’t care what the question or the answer was, or what Wally’s new answer would be.

This happened five or six more times during the morning. Each time, Alice would make a guess, and the brothers would continue their conversation or argument, never questioning if Alice was right or not. And Alice would just go back to her book.

“Alice!”

This time, it wasn’t as if she was coming out of a dream. She really *was* coming out of a dream! She had fallen asleep, and her book was on the floor under her chair.

“I *guess*...no, wait, I don’t have a guess.”

Wally laughed. “That’s because we were waking you to tell you it’s lunch time, not to make a guess.”

Just then, Roberta came into the room. She made a hand sign to tell Alice to come to the snack table. Meanwhile, the men got up from the meeting and walked out the door. They didn't talk to each other, and they didn't say anything to Alice.

Roberta told Alice, "Honey, your parents are up in your room, waiting for you. I told them I would send you up right away. You must have done a good job, child, because those men are both smiling, at least a little bit. I suppose they're getting along better now. So you go have lunch with your parents, and I'll call in a little while to let you know when the men want to start the meeting again."

Alice was glad to be on her feet again, and free to walk and talk. She thanked Roberta as she got on the elevator, and bounced up and down on her toes during the whole ride up to the room.

## Chapter 44

When Alice walked in to the little living room of the family's hotel suite, she was amazed at the sight out the windows: It was snowing! Not a thick, heavy, middle-of-winter snow, but a light snow to add to the patches of snow already on the ground.

Alice wanted to go out to the snow, but she remembered that she was hungry. "Can I go play in the snow after we eat?"

Her father frowned. "We're in the middle of downtown, so I don't think playing in snow is possible."

Alice had to agree, so she hid her longing to make snow angels and snowballs and focused on lunch instead. "So what do we do about eating?"

Alice's mother had an answer. "We're going to a restaurant just a few doors down from the hotel. We're going to try Ethiopian food!"

So down they went and out into the chilly air. Quickly, they walked to the restaurant and entered its warm dining room, full of unusual odors.

Alice's parents explained to the woman taking orders that this was their first time to eat Ethiopian food, so they wanted to sample several dishes – as long as they weren't too spicy! The woman smiled and said she would bring out her own favorites, and she was sure the family would enjoy them.

While they waited, Alice looked around the room. There were other people eating at other tables. And they were all eating with their hands – no knives, forks, or spoons!

"Mom! Dad! Everyone's eating with their hands! Are we going to do it, too?"

They looked at each other, then looked at the table. Sure enough, there was no silverware on their table, or on any other tables.

Alice's mother smiled. "Well, I guess if we're going to eat what Ethiopians eat, we ought to eat *how* the Ethiopians eat!"

Then the food arrived on a giant platter. In the middle of the platter was a stack of huge pancake-looking things, and all around the edges of the platter were little piles of food. They stared at the platter, not knowing exactly how to start.

The woman who served them leaned over and tore off a piece of the pancake stuff. "See, you tear off some sponge bread and put it between your thumb and fingers, like this. Then you use it to grab some food from one of the piles, like this. Then you pop it in your mouth, like this!"

Only instead of popping it into her own mouth, she popped it into Alice's mouth. What a sensation! It was spicy and chewy and unlike anything she had tasted before. She chewed while her parents watched. Then she swallowed.

"Wow, that was good!" she announced. "I want to do that myself!"

She tore off her own piece of sponge bread and picked up a bite from another pile. Her parents did the same, and the game began. The platter got spun around and around, as each person tried a different pile. Alice liked some better than others, but with everyone spinning the platter one way and the other, it was hard to remember which was which. But she reminded herself that she

wanted an adventure, and this was certainly part of it. So it was okay with her if some bites were tastier than others.

Suddenly a phone rang, and they all laughed as Alice's father fumbled food and napkins before he could reach in his pocket for his phone.

When he answered, he spent some time listening, then said, "Okay, I got it" and ended the call.

"That was Roberta. She says that the two Mr. Wilsons want to get back together with Alice late this afternoon. They figure they don't need much more time today, so we just have to have Alice back at the hotel by 4:00."

Alice's mother asked the obvious question. "So what do we do for the rest of the afternoon?"

Alice had an answer. "Let's call Joseph. I bet he knows some ways to spend the time!"

And so they did, and so did Joseph.

## Chapter 45

When Joseph arrived at the hotel, the snow had stopped, but it was still chilly outside. The family piled into his van quickly, and as Alice jumped in, she noticed a trash can lid lying in the far back of the vehicle. But the lid had no handle, as if someone had removed it. She forgot all about it as she greeted Joseph.

“Hi, Joseph! Where are you taking us? Or is it a surprise?”

Joseph turned around to face the family behind him. He grinned and said, “You know, when I came to St. Louis many years ago, I had never seen snow before in my whole life. In my country, it never snows. So I asked my new friends what they did on snowy days. And they told me that snowy days were perfect for going to the art museum. So that is what *we* are going to do!”

Alice’s parents looked at each other in confusion. Alice suddenly felt disappointed. She liked art, but she didn’t think art was the best choice when there was snow.

Joseph turned back and started the van, humming to himself cheerfully. He turned the van away from the river and the arch, driving in the opposite direction. And he started talking again as he drove.

“You know, the art museum is in the big park, which was once where there was a World’s Fair. That was way back in 1904, over a hundred years ago. But now the World’s Fair buildings are gone, except for the one that is now the art museum.”

Alice’s father perked up. “Oh, like the movie and the song about ‘Meet Me in St. Loueee’.”

That made Alice feel a little better, because she liked the silly song and especially the way her father sang it.

Joseph replied, “Yes, the song is from the World’s Fair, and the movie came along many years later, but they used that song in it.”

Now they were out of downtown and coming into a large park, with trees on all sides, and a light covering of snow on the ground.

“The museum is on top of that hill over there,” explained Joseph, and he turned the van toward it. In front of them was a large pond, and Joseph steered to the right of it.

As the van climbed the hill, the museum building appeared up above them. Then some movement caught Alice’s attention. It was people, whizzing down the snowy hill!

When the van got to the top, Alice could see the entire sight: Kids and grownups stood at the top of the hill, near the bottom steps of the museum. And instead of going up the steps and into the museum, they were climbing on sleds and racing down the hill, right toward the pond!

And some of the older kids, who didn’t have sleds, were using garbage can lids instead – just like the one she had seen...!

Joseph turned off the van and turned his head toward his passengers. “Did you think I was going to take you to see art? I thought so, too, when my friends took me many years ago. And I did not understand why they were carrying trash can lids and old cafeteria trays with them. But then I understood when I got here!”

And that is how Alice spent her snowy afternoon in Forest Park in St. Louis. At first, she was so sure that she would land in the pond that she refused to go down the hill. But Joseph showed her how he could fall off the lid just in time so that neither he nor the lid got wet.

Alice did what Joseph taught her. The first time, she rolled off the lid about halfway down the hill. The second time, she had enough confidence to go all the way to the bottom and roll off about 20 feet of the pond. When she had trudged triumphantly back up the hill, she insisted that her parents try it, too. "Hey, I ate Ethiopian food, so you can do this!" she shouted.

First her father tried, but he didn't seem to fit on the lid. The father of another family let him use their extra sled, and away he went. He sang "Meet Me in St. Loueeee-ee-eee" all the way down, his voice bumping with the sled.

When he got back up to the top, he offered the sled to Alice's mother, who grabbed it, jumped on it, and was gone in a flash. She came the closest to falling into the pond, but when she got back to the top, she told the others that had been her plan all along. They didn't believe her, and everyone laughed.

When all four of them had been down the hill too many times to count, a phone rang. It was Roberta again, reminding them that Alice needed to be in the meeting room in 20 minutes.

Alice's father shouted to Joseph. "Hurry, we've got to get back *now*!"

So the afternoon adventure came to an end. Alice had never had so much fun at an art museum!

## Chapter 46

The afternoon meeting was even more boring than the morning one. This time the two brothers talked business, almost the way two people from the same company might plan together. Wally stopped once to ask Alice if William was telling the whole truth, and William asked twice about Wally. The rest of the time, Alice read her book – except when she daydreamed about zooming down the hill at the park.

Every once in a while, Alice would look up and see the two men leaning toward each other with a large piece of paper between them. They seemed to be making plans, and their voices were serious, not argumentative.

Then Alice's stomach growled, so loud that the brothers stopped talking and looked at her. They had been so absorbed in their talk that they had forgotten all about the girl at the end of the table.

“What do you think, Willy? Should we let her go have dinner? Should we go have dinner ourselves?” Wally's voice was calmer now. It seemed he was able to talk to his twin more like a brother than like a competitor.

William answered the second question first. “Are you inviting me to dinner, Wally? The last time we had a meal together was...let's see...over twenty years ago! If you let me choose the restaurant, I'll let you pay. How's that?”

Wally laughed. “Sure, that's a good plan. I accept. So can we let Alice go for the day?”

“Oh, sure, why not?” replied William, who was already busy gathering up papers from the table in a most business-like way.

Alice scrambled out of her chair and raced to the door. Free again!

## Chapter 47

Alice and her parents spent the evening at the riverfront. They dined on a boat docked near the arch, and they got to watch the lights and boats and barges. It all looked so magical, looking out the windows while seated inside of a warm restaurant.

And then it was time to retire.

The next morning, the phone rang and Alice threw her covers over her head, wishing no one would answer it and she could spend the day without being stuck in a meeting between two big babies.

The phone did stop ringing, and a few moments later, Alice's father opened her door.

"Would the lady hiding under the covers please come to the phone and speak with Roberta?"

When Alice peeked out, she saw he was grinning, which made her feel hopeful. She climbed out of bed and went to the phone.

"Child, I don't know what you did in there yesterday." It was Roberta, for sure, but not sounding quite so business-like today. "Remember when the meeting ended, those boys were going out to eat together?"

Alice replied uncertainly, "Yes, I remember. Is everything alright? Did they get in a fight?"

Roberta laughed. "Fight? No! They went to dinner and then they talked half the night – without you! And now they're asleep, and I don't dare wake either of them. You did good, girlfriend!"

Alice got a little brave. "Does that mean there's no meeting this morning?"

"No meeting this morning or all day, as far as I can tell. Just keep a phone handy, in case I'm wrong."

Alice was exuberant now. "All day? Really? Wow! Wait till I tell Mom and Dad! Thanks, Roberta!" And she started bouncing on her toes as she put the phone down.

## Chapter 48

Alice and her parents were able to spend the whole day with Joseph, who took them to all sorts of interesting places. It was a real family vacation, with no interruptions. They had so much fun, it was after dark when they got back to the hotel.

When it was close to Alice's bedtime, the phone rang. Alice's mother answered, then called Alice to the phone.

"Alice, this is Roberta. Both of the Wilson boys are leaving tonight, so I won't see you again. But I have a message from Mr. Wilson and Mr. Wilson. They both want to say thanks for your guessing help, and they want you to know that they will express their appreciation to the whole country. Now, I don't know what they mean by that, but I *can* tell you that they are getting along with each other, and that's good for everyone.

"Joseph will pick you and your family up tomorrow morning at 9:00 to take you to the airport. Have a good trip, and remember that Roberta is your favorite auntie and girlfriend, right?"

Alice laughed. "Right! And thanks for helping me feel comfortable at the meetings when my mom and dad couldn't be there."

When Alice hung up, she announced that their vacation was over, and Joseph would be taking them to the airport in the morning.

They all seemed satisfied, but her father had a thought. "So those men never said thanks or good-bye to you? That seems strange, doesn't it?"

Alice thought for a moment. "I *guess*...they're too busy thinking about their businesses. They're even flying home tonight – not even waiting for morning."

Her parents agreed that this was probably true enough. People who run large businesses have to stay busy and focused, especially when their own name is part of the name of the business.

## Chapter 49

A few months passed, and Alice found ways to make guesses for people only when it was really important and she could be sure no one would feel hurt or shocked by what she said. And kids and grownups in her town got a lot wiser about asking for guesses, because they didn't want to feel hurt or shocked either.

One day, Alice came out from school and found her mother waiting for her near the bike racks. They hoisted her bike into the back of the car and climbed in. Alice saw a brown paper sack between her seat and her mother's.

"What's that?" she asked. "Can I open it?"

"No, you may not open it," her mother warned. "That's tonight's dessert, and it's a surprise." She said nothing more, and looked straight ahead while she drove, but she had a curious smile on her face.

Alice frowned, but decided not to argue. Why spoil a surprise?

That evening, when the family sat down to dinner, with the brown sack sitting mysteriously in the middle of the table, the doorbell rang.

Alice's father was instantly annoyed. "Who would disturb us at our dinner hour?" he grumbled, as he got up to answer the door.

A moment later, he came back to the table carrying a package wrapped in brown paper and bound in packing tape.

He looked at the package and read the label. "To Ms. Alice Westwright. Open after dinner."

So now there were two mystery packages in the middle of the table. All three Westwrights stared at them.

Finally, Alice's mother broke the silence. "Well, I know what I brought home should wait till after dinner. And this new package says the same. Maybe we should eat some dinner so we can end the mystery."

So they ate, surprisingly quickly.

Mr. Westwright handed the new package to Alice. "Here, you open it. It's addressed to you."

Mrs. Westwright interrupted. "But this is something I got today for Alice, too. Why don't you open it now?"

Alice sat with wide eyes, then started tearing open paper. The one her mother brought was a familiar-looking blue-and-white carton – from Wilson Bakery, of course.

"Yay! Dessert! Which one?"

Her mother smiled. "Read the label, Alice."

Alice read: "Alice's Cupcake Assortment – Guess Which Flavor You'll Get?" She opened the cover and found a dozen cupcakes, all with yellow cake and white icing.

"I don't get it," she complained. "Why does it say something about guessing flavors when they all look the same?"

Her mother tried to help. "Why don't we each take one and take a bite. Then we can pass it around. We'll see if they all taste the same or just look the same."

So they did that, and sure enough, they all tasted different – yummy but different – even though they all looked exactly the same!

Alice squealed. “This is so *neat*! Mr. Wilson made a new kind of cupcake – but really a *bunch* of new kinds!”

“And named them for you,” reminded her father. “So now let’s open the other package and see if it’s a pair of socks from your Aunt Mabel.”

Alice licked icing off her cheek. “Stop teasing me! I don’t have an Aunt Mabel!” But then she got busy opening the package.

There was a green and gold carton, with a big “Wally’s Wonders” label splashed in red.

“I guess Wallace realized we don’t live in an area that has his desserts,” offered Mr. Westwright. “So he sent us dessert by special delivery! What kind is it, Alice?”

Alice read: “Alice’s Guessberry Pie. Always delicious. Never the same.”

She excitedly handed the box to her mother, since pie isn’t as easy to serve as cupcakes. But her mother didn’t open the carton yet. Instead, she turned it around and started reading the ingredients.

“Made with blueberries and/or blackberries and/or strawberries and/or cherries and/or boysenberries and/or rhubarb and/or raspberries and/or whatever came in last night’s delivery.”

Everyone looked amazed and stunned. Then everyone started laughing. No wonder it was called Guessberry Pie! And no wonder it was named for Alice!

Mr. Westwright stopped laughing and looked at Alice. “Well, what do you *guess* is in *this* pie?”

Alice put her hands over her ears and shouted, “No, no, no! I don’t want to guess. I just want to eat! Some things are better when they surprise you – especially a dessert!”

So that night, Alice, the friend-guesser and animal-guesser and grown-up guesser, had too many desserts for a little girl. But that was okay with everyone, because after all, they had her name on them!

THE END