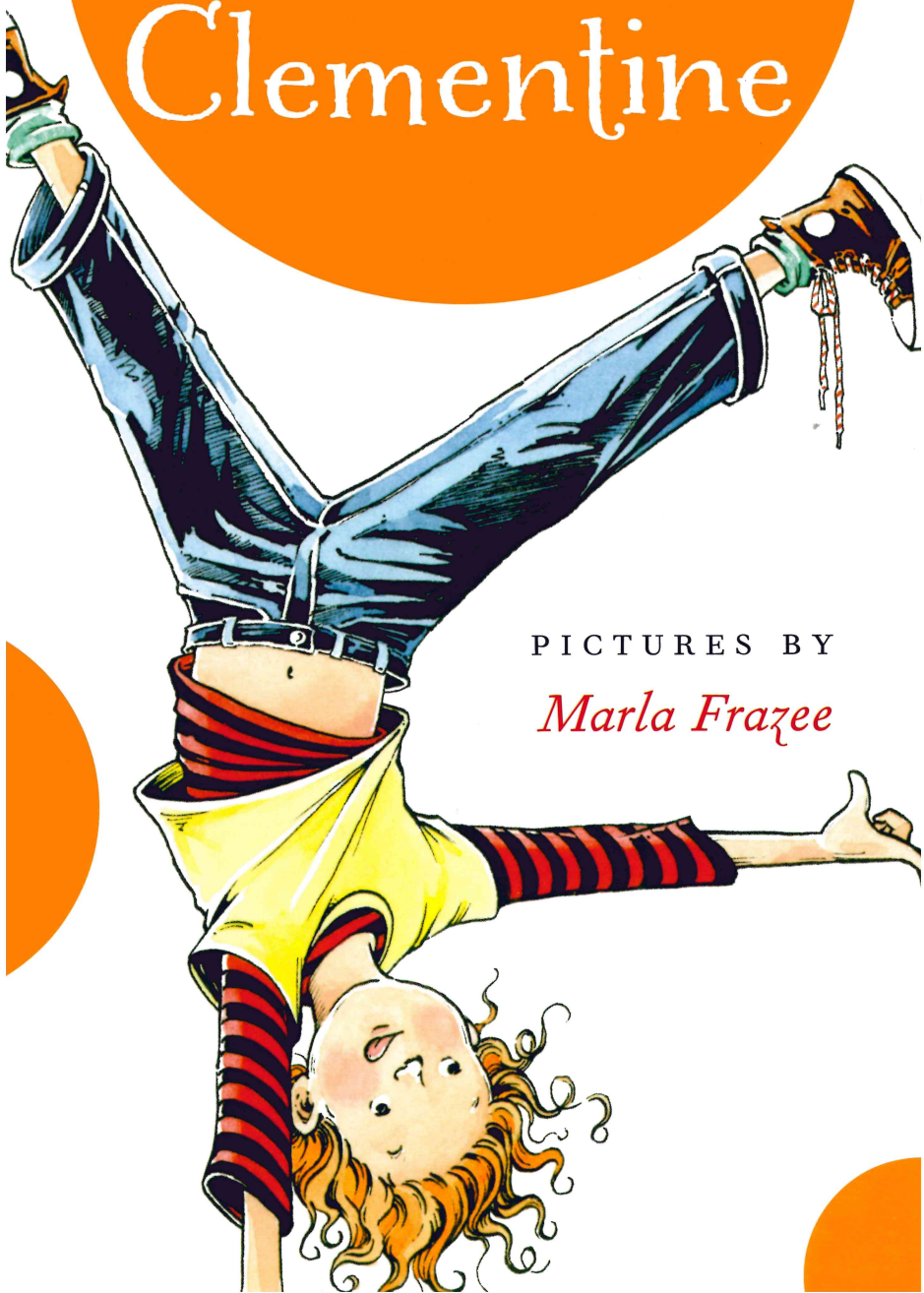


SARA PENNYPACKER

Clementine

PICTURES BY

Marla Frazee



CHAPTER

I

I have had not so good of a week.

Well, Monday was a pretty good day, if you don't count Hamburger Surprise at lunch and Margaret's mother coming to get her. Or the stuff that happened in the principal's office when I got sent there to explain that Margaret's hair was not my fault and besides she looks okay without it, but I couldn't because Principal Rice was gone, trying to calm down Margaret's mother.

Someone should tell you not to answer the phone in the principal's office, if that's a rule.

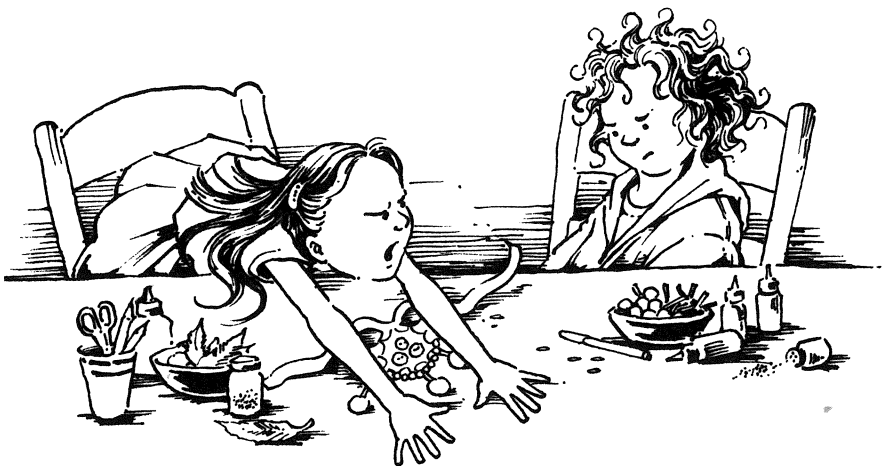
Okay, fine, Monday was not so good of a day.

Which was a surprise, because it started off with two lucky signs, which fooled me. First, there were exactly enough banana slices in my cereal: one for every spoonful. Then, as soon as I got to school, my teacher said, “The following students are excused from journal writing so they can go to the art room to work on their ‘Welcome to the Future’ projects.” And I was one of the following students!

So instead of having to think up things to write in my journal, which I hate, I got to glue and paint stuff, which I love.

Margaret was in the art room, too. When I sat down next to her, she threw herself across the Princess-from-the-Future mask she was gluing sparkles onto. “Remember the rules,” she warned.

Margaret is in fourth grade and I am in third. She thinks that that makes her the boss of me. I hate Margaret’s rules.



“You can’t touch my stuff,” she said. Which she always says.

“Why?” I said. Which *I* always say.

“Because it’s the rule,” Margaret said. Which she always says.

“Why?” I said.

“Because you can’t touch my stuff,” she said.

And then I pointed out the window. Which wasn’t exactly lying, because I didn’t say there was something out there.

While Margaret was looking out the window, I accidentally touched her mask.

Twice. Okay, fine.

Then I got busy working on my project so I wouldn't have to hear any "Clementine-pay-attention!"s.

Except I did anyway. Which was unfair because each time, I was the *only* person in the whole art room who *was* paying attention. Which is why I could tell everyone right in the middle of the Pledge of Allegiance that the lunchroom lady was sitting in the janitor's car and they were kissing. *Again*. No one else saw this disgusting scene, because no one else was paying attention out the window!

And after that, when it was my turn to pass around the stapler, I could tell everyone that the art teacher's scarf had an egg stain on it that

looked—if you squinted—exactly like a pelican, which nobody else had noticed.

“Clementine, you need to pay attention!” the art teacher said one more time. And just like the other times, I *was* paying attention.

I was paying attention to Margaret’s empty seat.

Margaret had been excused to go to the girls’ room, and when she left she had scrunched-up don’t-cry eyes and a pressed-down don’t-cry mouth. And she had been gone a really long time, even for Margaret, who washes her hands one finger at a time.

“I need to go to the girls’ room,” I told my teacher.

And that’s where Margaret was, all right: curled up under the sink with her head on her knees.

“Margaret!” I gasped. “You’re sitting on the floor!”

Margaret hitched herself over to the side a little so I could see: she'd placed a germ-protective layer of paper towels under her.

"Still," I said. "What's the matter?"

Margaret pressed her head down harder into her knees, which were all shiny with tears. She pointed up. Lying on the sink, next to a pair of Do-Not-Remove-from-the-Art-Room scissors, was a chunk of straight brown hair.

Uh-oh.

"Come out, Margaret," I said. "Let me see."

Margaret shook her head. "I'm not coming out until it's grown back."

"Well, I think I see a germ crawling up your dress."

Margaret jumped out from under the sink.

She looked at herself in the mirror and began to cry again. "I got glue in my hair," she sobbed. "I was just trying to cut it out. . . ."

Margaret's hair was halfway-down-her-back long. It was hard not to notice that the whole part over her left ear was missing.



“Maybe if we evened up a chunk over your right ear . . .” I suggested.

Margaret wiped her eyes dry and nodded. She handed me the scissors.

I cut. We looked back in the mirror.

“It’s like bangs.” I tried to cheer her up. “Sort of.”

“Except bangs are in your front hair, not the sides,” Margaret reminded me. Then she took a deep sigh, picked up the scissors, and cut off all the hair over her forehead.

Now the front half of her hair was all chopped off and the back half was long and straight and shiny.

“Not so good,” Margaret said, looking in the mirror.

“Not so good,” I agreed.

We looked at her not-so-good hair in the mirror

for a really, really long time without saying anything, which is very hard for me. Then Margaret's bottom lip began to shiver and her eyes filled up with tear-balls again. She handed the scissors back to me, and then she closed her eyes and turned around.

"All of it?" I asked.

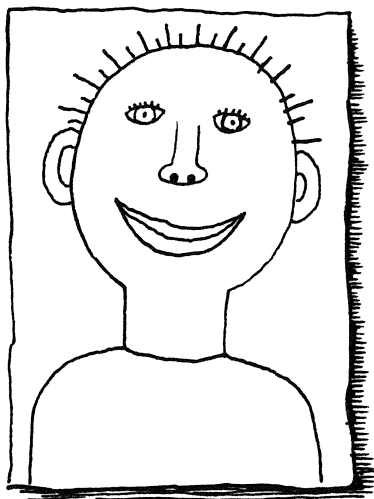
"All of it."

So I did. Which is not exactly easy with those plastic art scissors, let me tell you. And just as I was finishing, the art teacher came in looking for us.

"Clementine!" she shouted. "*What are you doing?*"

And then Margaret went all historical, and the art teacher went all historical, and nobody could think of anything to do except the regular thing, which is: send *me* to the principal's office.

While I was waiting there, I drew a picture of Margaret with her chopped-off hair. I made her look beautiful, like a dandelion. Here is a picture of that:



If they had a special class for gifted kids in art, I would definitely be in it. But they don't, which is also unfair—only for math and English. I am not so good at English, okay, fine. But this year I am in the gifted class for math. And here is the bad surprise—so far, no gifts.

I told Principal Rice about that problem when she got back from calming down Margaret's mother.

"So far, no gifts," I told her, extremely politely.

Principal Rice rolled her eyes to the ceiling then, like she was looking for something up there. Ceiling snakes maybe, just waiting to drip on you. That's what I used to be afraid of when I was little, anyway. Now I am not afraid of anything.

Okay, fine, I am afraid of pointy things. But that is all. And boomerangs.

"Clementine, you need to pay attention," said Principal Rice. "We need to discuss Margaret's hair. What are you doing on the floor?"

"Helping you look for ceiling snakes," I reminded her.

"*Ceiling* snakes? *What* ceiling snakes?" she asked.

See what I mean? Me—paying attention; every-



body else—not. I am amazed they let someone with this problem be the boss of a school.

“All right, now, Clementine,” Principal Rice said in her I’m-trying-to-be-patient-but-it’s-getting-harder voice. “Why did you cut off Margaret’s hair?”

“I was helping,” I said.

And then I told Principal Rice about how I'd helped her, too. "I answered the phone while you were gone. I ordered some new school pets, and I told the gym teacher we are never going to play dodgeball again, and I made two appointments for you. The phone kept going dead, so I guess it's busted. But at least I helped you a little."

That's what *I* thought.

There is a look they teach a person to make in principal school that is not very nice.



CHAPTER

2

Margaret was waiting for me in the lobby of our apartment building when I got off the bus after school. I showed her my picture.

“AAAUUUUGGGGHHH!!” she screamed. “I look like a *dandelion*!”

That’s how good of an artist I am: everybody always knows what it is.

“Dandelions are beautiful.” I pulled her into the elevator, which has mirrors on all sides, so she could see.

Margaret shook her head. “For flowers, maybe. Not for people’s heads. Besides, dandelions are

yellow, not brown. I look like a *dead* dandelion.” Then she brightened up a little. “Maybe *that* would help. If my hair were yellow.” Then she took a long I-wish look at my hair in the mirror. “Or *red*.”

And for the first time that day, I saw Margaret smile!

“I could do that for you, Margaret!” I told her. “Oh, sure! I could make your hair red, just like mine.”

“How?” Margaret asked.

I’d been so happy to see Margaret smile that I’d forgotten to figure out that part. But then a great idea popped into my head. I am lucky that way: great ideas are always popping into my head without me having to think them up. “My mother has some special markers for her work. They color over anything, and they stay there. Spinach got hold of one and drew all over the walls and my

parents couldn't get it off. They had to paint the room over. That's how permanent those markers are."

Okay, fine, my brother's name is not really Spinach. But I got stuck with a name that is also a fruit, and it's not fair that he didn't. The only thing worse than a fruit name is a vegetable name, so that's what I think he should have. I have collected a lot of names for him.

"*Spinach* did that?" Margaret said. "The *easy* one?"

I squint-eyed her. "The *easy* one?"

"That's what my mother calls him. She says it's a good thing your parents got an easy one after you. Same thing in my family, but I'm the easy one. She says when there are two kids in a family, there's always an easy one and a hard one. I guess it's a rule."

"Oh, yeah," I said. "I knew that."

But I didn't.

"So how about those markers?" Margaret reminded me.

"Okay," I said. If the easy one could use them, I guessed the hard one could, too. "Let's go." And then we pressed *B* for basement and we rode down to my apartment.

I ran into the kitchen and climbed up onto the counter and grabbed the box of markers from where my mom had hidden them and jumped down. Before I left, I yelled to my mother in the living room, "Hi, Mom, everything went great at school, I was really paying attention, and now I'm going to play with Margaret because everything's fine with Margaret, no problems, 'bye." Just so she wouldn't worry.

And then I ran back out to Margaret in the elevator. She looked through the box and pulled out a marker named Flaming Sunset. Then she took off

the cap and held the marker up against my hair. "Perfect," she said. "Let's go up to my apartment."

I'd forgotten about that part, too. "Is your mother still mad?" I asked.

"Yep. But she took three aspirin and went back to work. Only my brother is home."

So I said okay and we rode the elevator up to Margaret's apartment, even though I don't like Margaret's room.

One reason I don't like to go there is Mascara. Mascara always hides under Margaret's bed and hisses because he hates everyone except Margaret, but sometimes I can see his tail or one paw, and then I feel too sad because it reminds me of my old cat Polka Dottie who died.

Last year Polka had three kittens in my bureau drawer, which luckily I always leave open. My parents let me name them. Since I have discovered

that the most exquisite words in the world are on labels you will find in a bathroom, I carried the kittens into the bathroom and looked around until I found them beautiful names. Fluoride and Laxative went to live with people who answered the *Free Kittens, Hurry!* ad my dad put in the paper, which was unfair to Polka because they were strangers. Then Margaret's mother said, "All right, Margaret, you can have a kitten as long as you take care of it yourself." And that was good, because at least Mascara would be living with someone Polka knew.

Except then Polka Dottie died. So now Margaret has a cat that's just fine and I don't.

But the main reason I don't like to go to Margaret's room is that it makes me feel itchy.

I feel itchy in Margaret's room because it looks like a magazine picture. Everything matches and everything is always exactly where it's supposed to

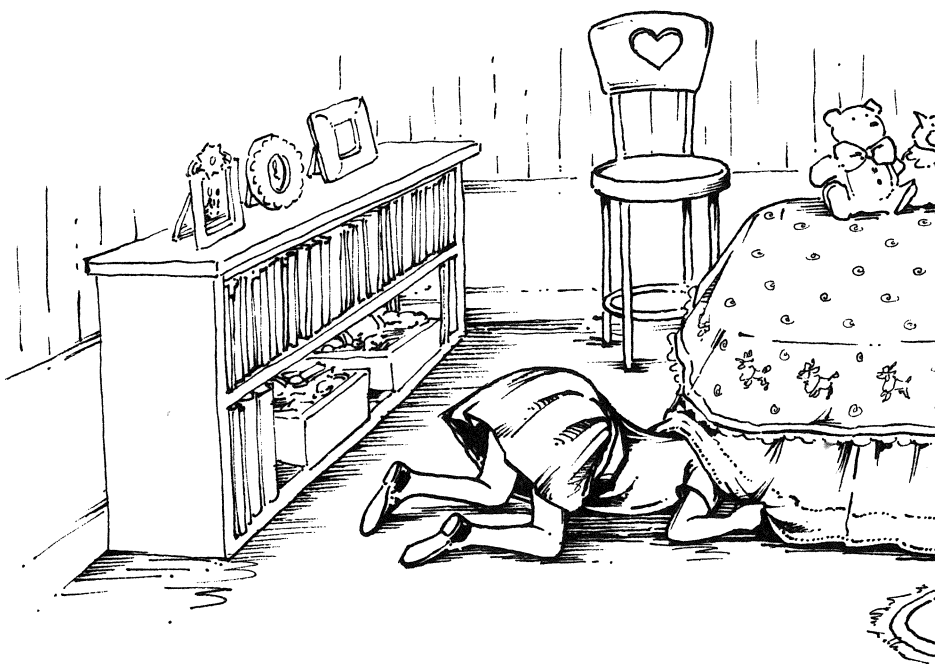
be, in straight lines. Plus, nothing in her room is broken. And it's all clean—not a speck of dirt is allowed into her room. Actually, Margaret looks like a magazine picture, too. Her hair is always combed—well, it *used* to be—and her clothes always match and I think she probably sleeps in her bathtub, because I have never seen a single smudge of dirt on her.

I like her anyway, but it's not always easy.

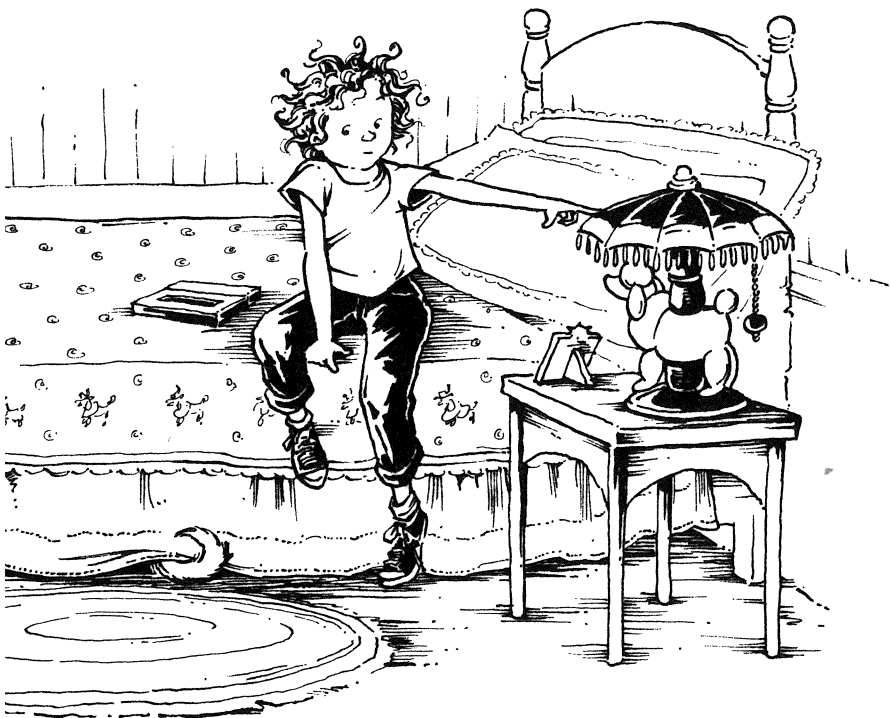
“Remember the rules,” Margaret said at her bedroom door.

While Margaret was looking under the bed for Mascara, I accidentally touched her lamp, which is a china poodle with an umbrella that Margaret calls a parasol because she is a show-off. Margaret turned around fast, but my hands jumped into my pockets even faster.

“All right,” I said, “let's get going with the coloring.” This is called Changing the Subject.



It is very hard to color hair with a marker, let me tell you. But I did it. I colored all of Margaret's hair chunks Flaming Sunset, and then another really great idea popped into my head and I drew Flaming Sunset curls all over her forehead and the back of her neck so her hair would look more like mine. It looked beautiful, like a giant tattoo of



tangled-up worms. When I am a grown-up, I will have hundreds of tattoos.

Margaret looked in the mirror, then she looked at my hair, then she looked in the mirror again and she said, “Okay, good.”

And then she told me she was getting bracelets put on her teeth.



“You mean braces,” I told her.

“No,” she said. “Bracelets. They’re a *special* kind of braces. They’re *jewelry*.”

“Oh,” I said. “I knew that.”

But I didn’t. Okay, fine.

Later that night, when I was just at the hard part of falling asleep, which is lying in the dark trying not to think about pointy things, I heard the phone ring.

My dad said, “Hi, Susan,” which is Margaret’s mother’s name, and then he didn’t say anything for a long time. Then he said, “Now, Susan, let’s just look at this calmly,” and then he didn’t say anything for another long time. And then he said “I’m sorry” seven times, which is two more times than he said it after he told my mother he thought her overalls were getting a little snug.

Next I heard him go into my brother’s room, where my mom was putting Broccoli to bed, to say good night to him. Then I heard my parents whispering together as they walked down the hall to my room.

And I thought this would be an ideal time to practice pretending to be asleep.

I could feel them standing in my doorway, probably thinking, This hard one is a lot more trouble than the easy one. Then my dad said, “I really think Clementine was just trying to help her.



Margaret wanted hair like Clementine's. You know she's always been a little jealous."

That was the craziest thing I'd ever heard, because Margaret is perfect. But I couldn't tell them this, because an important part of pretending to be asleep is not talking.



CHAPTER

3

I don't even want to think about the school part of Tuesday because it makes me too mad. "Margaret's mother sent a note to her teacher today that said 'watch out my daughter isn't left alone with Clementine!'" I told my mom as soon as I got home.

"Margaret's mother is upset right now," my mom said. "I guess I would be, too." Then she let me stir grape jelly into my milk to make me feel better.

I must have still been wearing a mad face when my dad walked in, because he just took one look at

me and then handed me the key to the service elevator. My dad is the manager of our whole apartment building. He says that means all the people who live in the building, and even the pigeons, are the boss of him. But he has the keys to everything so I think that makes *him* the boss. And he understands that riding the service elevator calms me down when I'm mad.

Dad said, "Four times, Sport, that's all. And they're painting up on seven. If the painters need the elevator, you have to get right off."

So I rode up to seven to see if the painters needed any help. You never know.

And guess what I saw: three men painting the ceiling . . . *on stilts*! I am not even making this up!

"Need any help?" I asked. "Want me to put on some stilts?"

I guess they were being polite because they said,

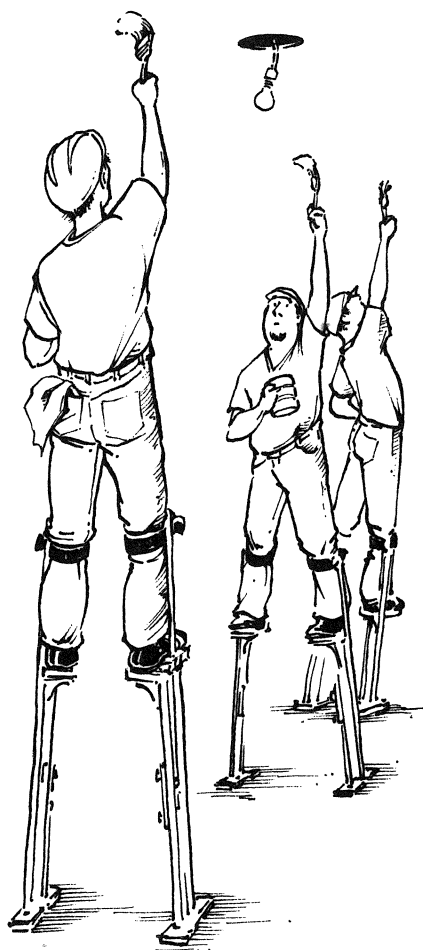
“No, thanks, kiddo, we’re all set,” even though I could see they had a lot more to do.

So I rode the elevator exactly three more times and then I went back home. When I opened the door, I could hear my mom still talking to my dad about the note.

“How do you think that made her feel?” she said. “Imagine! As if our daughter is a common criminal!”

My dad snorted and said, “Well, that *is* insulting. There is absolutely nothing *common* about Clementine!”

And then my mom said, “That’s not funny,” and my dad



said, “Yes, it is. A little,” and my mom said, “Okay, I guess it is. A little. But what are we going to do?”

And then I quickly closed the door and went back out before I could hear the answer in case it was “Let’s trade her in for an easier kid.”

I sat out in the lobby, waiting to get enough bravery to go up to the fifth floor and say *Sorry* to Margaret’s mother, and ask her for a note that said “I do not think your daughter is a common criminal.” Finally it came.

I didn’t take the elevator to Margaret’s apartment because I couldn’t risk running into old Mrs. Jacobi. Every time I see her she hands me a five-dollar bill and says, “Run to the store and get me a box of Cheerios, dearie.” I don’t like to do it because then I have to bring it to her apartment on the top floor and talk to her while she counts the change and then hands me fifty cents. But if she

asks me, I have to say yes because A) she is four hundred years old and I am polite, and B) I need the money because I am saving up to buy a gorilla and I bet they cost L-O-T-S, *lots*.

Anyway, I didn't have enough extra bravery to say *No, thanks*, to her too. So I walked up the back stairway—five times twelve stairs, which equals sixty—and I went to 5A and knocked.

Margaret's mother opened it and she just stood there looking like a magazine picture of a mother in a magazine picture of a living room.

I said, "Hi," and a bad surprise happened. Although I had never practiced it before, my voice sounded exactly like a common criminal's.

"You can't play with Margaret today, Clementine. She's spending the afternoon in her room, Thinking About the Consequences of Her Actions. Which is what you should be doing, too."

Okay, fine, she didn't actually say the last thing. But I could tell she was thinking it hard.

Behind her, Margaret's brother, Mitchell, leaned out from the kitchen doorway so I could see only his head and shoulders. Then, even though he is in Junior High and Should Know Better, he grabbed his hair and pretended to yank himself back into the kitchen. And I laughed even though I knew it was his own hand.

I do not think someone should be called "the hard one" if they make other people laugh.

"Clementine, there's nothing funny about this," said Margaret's mother.

I didn't tell her what was so funny and I didn't say any *Sorrys* and I didn't ask for a new note, in case I still had a common criminal's voice. I just ran down the hall.

This time I *did* take the elevator, because I was *hoping* I'd run into Mrs. Jacobi so I wouldn't have



to go right home. But I didn't, so I did. And when I opened the door to the apartment, I saw that our living room looked all wrong.

My mother was working at her drawing table. Suddenly I realized I had never seen a drawing table in a magazine picture of a living room.

I banged the door shut hard. "Margaret's mother always wears a dress." I didn't know I was going to say this.

"Margaret's mother works in a bank," my mother answered, still working on her drawing. "It might be a rule."

"Still," I said.

"I'm an artist, Clementine. I want to be comfortable. I get paint all over my clothes. I have to wear overalls or jeans. You know that, right?"

"Yes," I said. "*Still.*"

My mother put down her pencil and looked up then. "Clementine, do you sometimes wish you



had the kind of mother who worked in a bank and wore dresses?”

I nailed my mouth down so it couldn't say *Yes, maybe, sometimes*, and quick looked out the window, so my mother couldn't see my eyes thinking it.

Then my mother got up and looked out the window, too. Our apartment is at the basement level, which is halfway underground. This means the

windows are right at the sidewalk height. So we both just stood there pretending to be extremely interested in all the feet passing by. What I was really doing was trying to imagine my mother in a dress. I guess that's what she was doing, too, because suddenly we both made corner-eyes at each other and then we burst out laughing and couldn't stop.

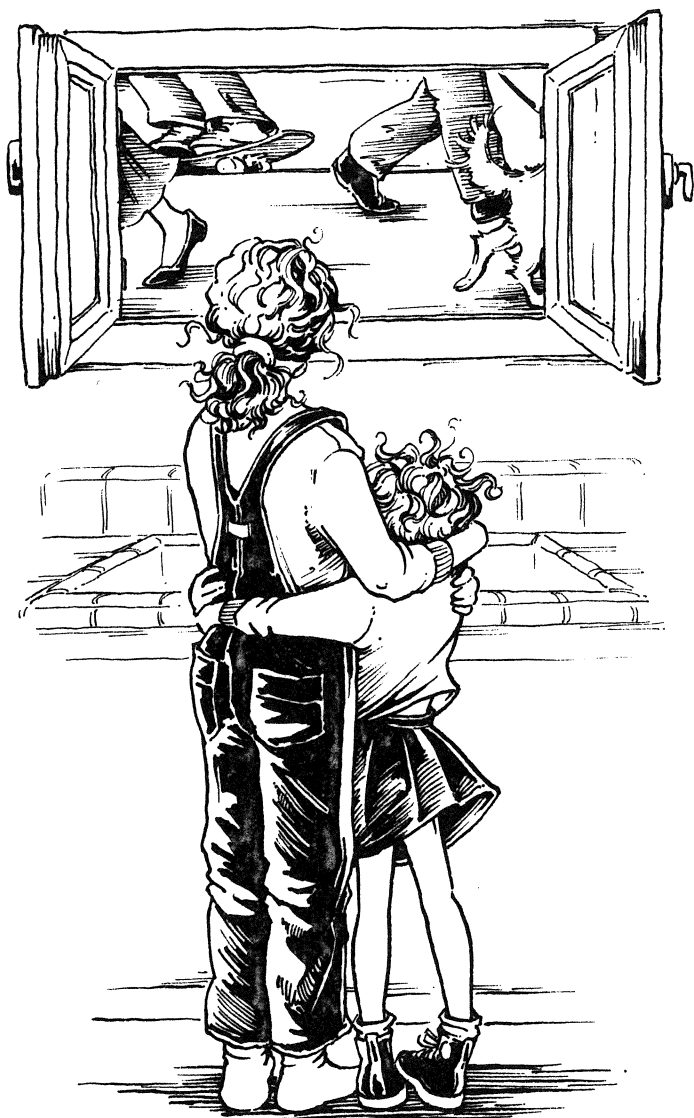
Finally my mother wiped her eyes and said, "Oh, come on. It wouldn't be *that* funny, would it?"

And I said, "Yep, it would."

And then I knew it was exactly the right time to tell her my secret. "When I grow up, I might be an artist."

And do you know what she said?

"Oh, Clementine, you already are! You may end up being something else, too—whatever you want to be—but you'll always be an artist. You just are."



And suddenly our living room looked exquisite with a drawing table in it! But now my fingers itched to be drawing, so I put on my jacket and went to the park to find something interesting to draw.

My dad says I am excellent at noticing interesting things. In fact, he says if noticing interesting



things were a sport, I would have a neckful of gold medals. He says that's a Very Good Sign for My Future. He says I could be a good detective, of course, but that noticing things is good for any career.

My mom says that means I could be a good artist, too.

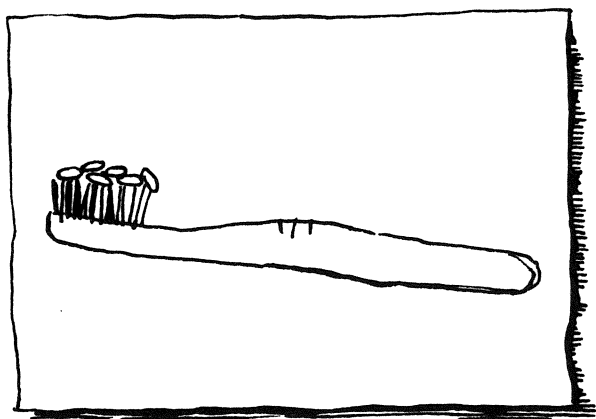
Or a writer. Last year a writer came to my school and said, *Pay Attention!* But she didn't mean to the teacher, she meant pay attention to what's going on around you, so you can write about it. Then she looked exactly at me and said to notice the good stuff and write it down so you don't forget it.

So, even though I'm not going to be a writer—too much sitting still—I notice interesting things and write them down. I draw them, too.

In the park, I saw something great right away: a

woman eating lentils from a thermos . . . with a toothbrush! Even though she had a fork right there, which she was using to eat her salad!

So I asked the lady if I could draw a picture of the lentils on her toothbrush and she said, “Sure,” so I did and here it is:



As soon as I got home I wrote it all down and asked my mom if we could have lentils for dinner.

“You hate lentils, Clementine,” my mother reminded me.

“Well, I think I’ve been eating them wrong,” I said.

So we had lentils and I ate them the new way and guess what? It worked. The lentils stuck on the bristles and didn’t slide off like with a fork. So I got lots and lots of lentils in my mouth.

Which was a bad thing because I hate lentils.



CHAPTER

4

"I'd better not go to school today," I told my mom on Wednesday as soon as I woke her up. "I have cracked toes." I put my foot right up on the pillow next to her face so she could see without getting up. This is called Being Thoughtful.

"Nope," she said, without even opening her eyes to see if it was true.

"Well, that's not all," I said. "I also have the heartbreak of sore irises."

"Nope," she said again, and she still didn't open her eyes.

"Actually, I think I have arthritis," I said. "Mrs.

Jacobi was breathing on me in the elevator the other day, and I must have caught it.”

“Oh, please,” she said, but this time she opened one eye. And then she made exactly the sound Polka Dottie used to make when she had a hairball.

I grabbed the corner of the quilt and covered my head, but my mom pulled it off again. She took my head in her hands and twisted it around to see all the sides. Too hard, like I wasn’t inside it.

“You’ve cut off all your hair!” she said. “You’ve



cut off all your beautiful hair! What on earth were you *thinking*, Clementine?”

“I wanted to make Margaret feel better,” I explained. “I didn’t want her to be the only one! But I forgot: Margaret’s not going to school today. She has an appointment at the orthodontist’s to have bracelets put on her teeth.”

Mom groaned and closed her eyes again. But she slid over and made room for me on the warm part of her sheets.

I climbed in and took a big sniff. My mom’s part of the bed smells like cinnamon rolls. My dad’s part smells like pinecones. Right in the middle it’s all mixed up perfectly—that’s my favorite place to be. But this morning, Dad was already off to fight in The Great Pigeon War and it was fine just being on the cinnamon-roll part.

My mom put her arm around me. “Oh. So now *you’ll* be the only one,” she said. “I’m sorry, honey,

but you can't stay home. You have to go and face the music."

So I had to go to school, which almost turned out to be a very bad mistake, because I almost had to go to the hospital with the ambulance and the sirens and everything!

It happened in the principal's office, when my teacher sent me there to have a little chat about sitting still.

When I walked in, Principal Rice made the hair-ball sound, too. "Clementine!" she gulped. "What have you *done*? You've chopped off your hair!"

I was glad she'd answered her question so I didn't have to. "Wow," I said instead. "*Clementine and Rice*! We both have food names!"

Mrs. Rice sealed her lips tight like she was afraid her teeth were going to run away. Then she opened up the note from my teacher.

"I can't help it," I said, before she could start the little chat. "I'm allergic to sitting still."

"Nobody is allergic to sitting still, Clementine," she said.

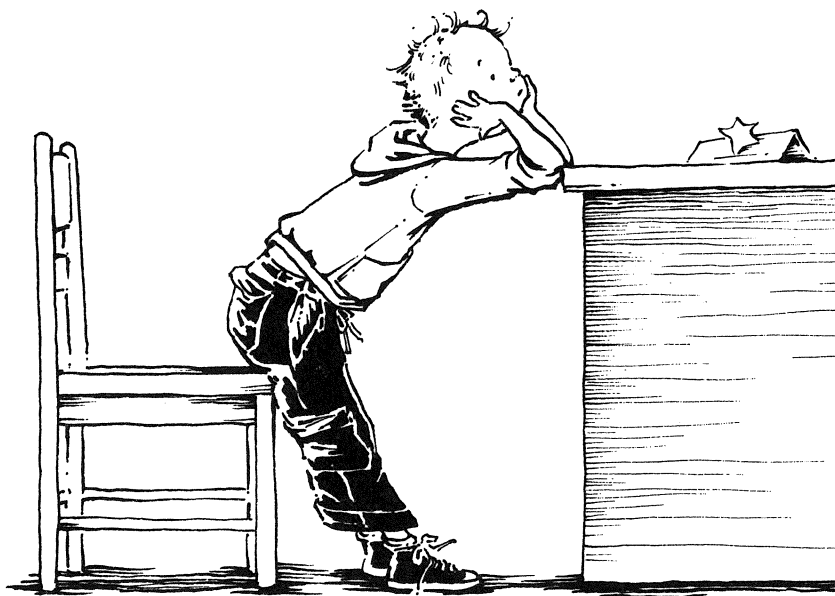
"I am," I said. "My brother is allergic to peanuts. If he eats one he gets all itchy and swelled up and he can't breathe right. If I try to sit still I get all itchy and swelled up and I can't breathe right. So that means I'm allergic to sitting still."

Mrs. Rice squeezed her eyes shut and rubbed her forehead. I happen to know this means *This idea is so bad it's giving me a headache*, because it's the face I make when my mother tells me to visit Mrs. Jacobi. The face never works for me.

"Plus," I explained, "if my brother eats even one tiny peanut he might have to go to the hospital with the ambulance and sirens and everything!"

So if I sit still for even one minute . . . Uh-oh!" I gave my body an extra little jiggle just to stay safe. "Phew!" I said. "That was close!"

Principal Rice sighed like a leaky balloon. "Clementine, do you think when you're in class you could just try to wiggle a little more quietly from now on?"



I asked my body about this and it said, "Sure," so I told it to Mrs. Rice. "Sure," I said.

"Good," she said. "Now, as long as you're here, how about we discuss your hair?"

Thinking about my hair made me think about Margaret. Thinking about Margaret made me remember about her getting bracelets on her teeth.



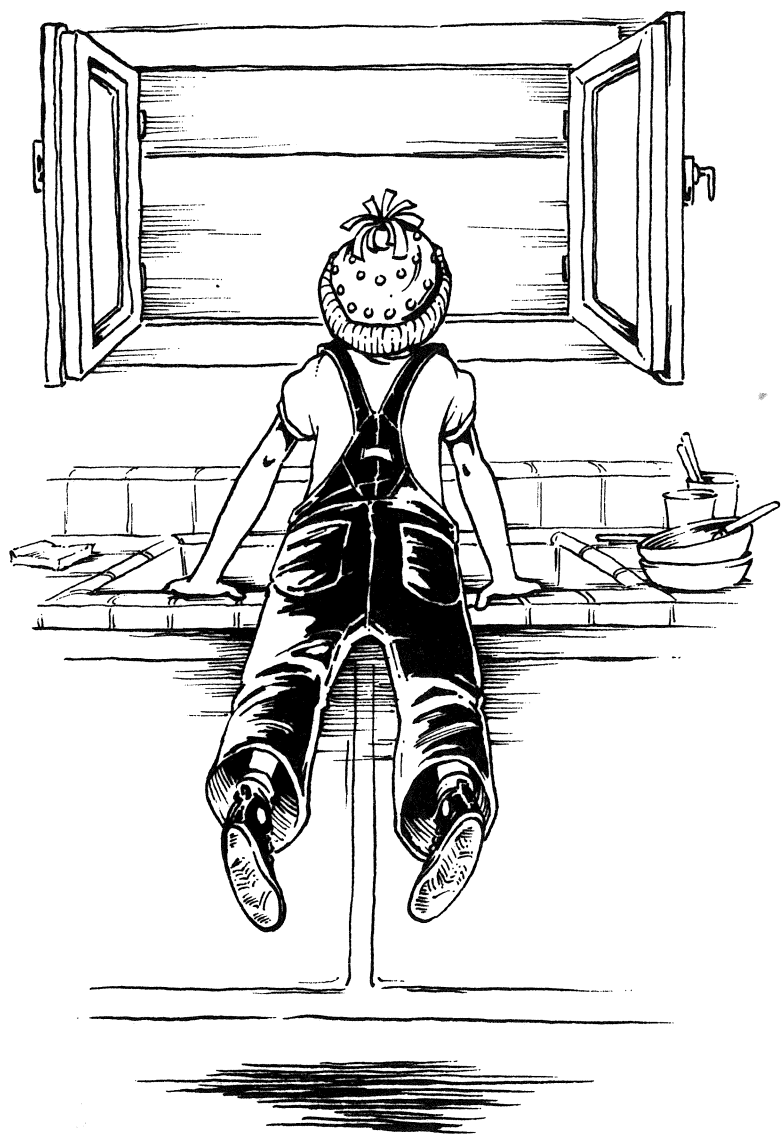
I want bracelets on my teeth more than anything. But then I had a bad thought: what if they had pointy edges?

I didn't want to have any pointy things stuck in my mind to worry me all day, so I looked out the window, because the only way to erase pointy things is with round things, and clouds are good for that. Right away I saw a cloud that would make a wonderful tattoo: it looked exactly like a dog, if dogs had only two legs—on the top, not the bottom. I am not allowed to have tattoos yet—which is unfair—so for now, I just draw things on my arms so I don't forget them. But I didn't have a pen. I looked around the desk to see if Mrs. Rice had a tattoo-drawing pen, and suddenly I realized something very suspicious: *I had never seen Mrs. Rice's arms!* They were always in principal sleeves!

“Do you have a tattoo?” I asked. “Can I see it?”

“What?” Mrs. Rice asked. “Clementine, we were talking about your hair!”

“That was a long time ago,” I reminded her. I added a kind smile, because it’s not her fault she has trouble paying attention.



CHAPTER

5

As soon as I got home, I started watching for Margaret's feet. From my kitchen window I can see the sidewalk in front of the lobby doors. Since I have memorized all the shoes of everybody who lives in our building, I always know who's coming in or going out. I might be a detective when I grow up.

I waited and I waited and I waited, which is the hardest thing in the world. Especially when you have a hot head, which I did, because my mother made me wear my winter hat so she didn't have to

look at my chopped-off hair. Finally I saw Margaret's purple sneakers, and I ran up to meet her in the lobby.

"Let me see."



Margaret pulled her lips out of the way so I could see all of her teeth.

Margaret's mouth was the most beautiful place I have ever seen. It was even more beautiful than Disneyland, Sleeping Beauty's Castle, which I am going to visit when I am ten. Every tooth had its own sparkly silver bracelet and there were little blue bits sprinkled around like tiny presents.

"They're rubber bands," Margaret said. "Every month I'll go in and get them changed and they'll give me different colors. Whatever I want."

That gave me such a good idea.

I pulled off my hat to show Margaret that she wasn't the only one, and that made her happy. Then I told her my good idea. "You can pick the color of my new hair. Whatever color you want. You can draw it on my head." That made her even happier.

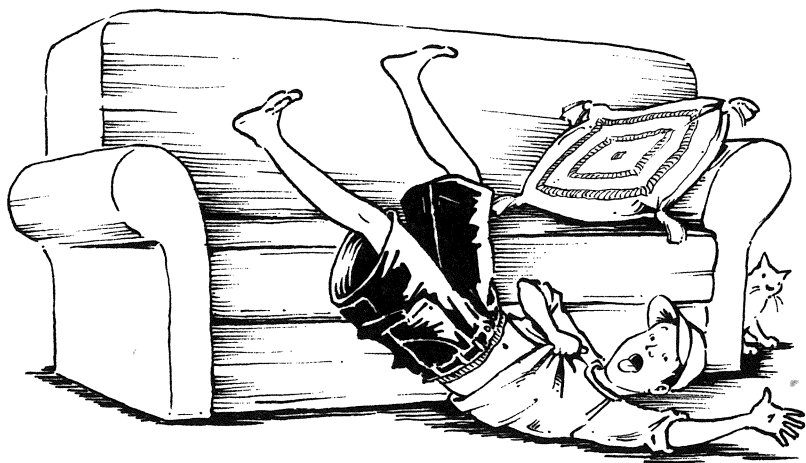
"Those markers are still in my room. Let's go," she said.

"Is your mother still mad?" I asked.

"Yep. But she's going to a movie with Alan this afternoon."

Alan is Margaret's mother's "special friend," which is the grown-ups' word for boyfriend.

So we went up to her apartment. Mitchell was there, watching TV. When he saw my hair, he grabbed his chest and fell off the couch, pretending to have a heart attack. Then he smacked his forehead and said, "You guys are unbelievable. Absolutely unbelievable," even though he is older



and doesn't have to be so nice to us. I think he likes me.

Margaret glared at him. Then she jabbed her elbow into my side and so I glared at him, too, even though I didn't know why we were doing that. I'm not so sure Margaret is the easy one in that family.

She dragged me into her room. "I can't wait for summer," she growled. "My mother's finally going to get rid of him."

“You mean baseball camp? He wants to go, Margaret. That’s not getting rid of someone.”

Margaret gave me her I’m-in-fourth-grade-and-you’re-not look. “Good-bye and good riddance,” she muttered.

Then she got out my mother’s markers. They were all still there and they looked exactly the same, with none of the caps chewed up. I don’t know how Margaret does that. She picked a bright green one and colored my hair and then drew some curls on my forehead and neck.

“No pointy lines,” I reminded her. “Just round ones.”

Thinking about pointy lines made me wonder about Margaret’s bracelets again. “How do they feel? I bet they’re full of pointy parts.”

“Nope, they feel like *heaven*,” Margaret said. “No pointy parts at all. They’re as soft as rabbit ears. *Baby* rabbit ears. Too bad you can’t have

them.” She kept her lips stretched out of the way to show me her teeth the whole time she talked, so it was kind of hard to understand her.

But I did.

“I’m getting them, too,” I said. “Next week.”

Then I pulled my hat back on and ran down to my apartment quick to make this be a non-lie.

“I need bracelets on my teeth,” I told my mom. “They’re beautiful and they feel wonderful.”

“First of all,” my mother said, “they don’t feel wonderful. Not in the beginning, anyway. Margaret’s mother stopped in earlier, asking if we had any medicine left over from when your brother was teething. She told me Margaret cried all the way home.”

That Margaret.

“Well, I still want them. Next week.”

“And second of all, you don’t need them. Your teeth are straight enough.”

Which is the most unfair thing I have ever heard.

“I can feel them bending,” I said. And suddenly I could. “So we’d better make that appointment.”

Then, before my mom could get to third of all, which is usually the worst one, we heard my brother waking up from his nap.

“I’m coming, Radish,” I called to him.

“Go for a wok?” he asked, when I came into his room.

“You’re lucky to have me for a big sister,” I told him. I have to remind him of this every day, because he forgets. We went into the kitchen and I got out the wok. “Nobody invented this trick for me when I was little.”

Then he climbed into the wok and grabbed the handles and I gave him a really good spin. He went whirling around, bumping into the cabinets, and then he got out and walked wobbly until he fell



over, which he thinks is the funniest thing in the world.

“Again!” he yelled.

But I didn’t spin him again, because he throws up on the second ride and somebody has to clean it up which is N-O-T, *not* me. This is called Being Responsible.

He came over to me and pulled off my hat and pointed to my head. "Green?"

And I thought about something.

First Margaret had straight brown hair, and we didn't look alike. Then we cut it off and colored it red, so we sort of did. Then she got bracelets on her teeth, which meant we didn't look alike. But soon her teeth would be straight, and we would. Except now I had a green head.

What if we never looked alike?

What if we did?

