

Laura and Paul

CHAPTER ONE

i

Something was moving. Slowly. It was shiny and kind of round but long. Laura tried to make her eyes look harder. A raindrop? For a minute she wondered where it was. "Silly, it must be where you are," she said to herself. "But where am I?"

"Next to this moving raindrop."

It was hard to get her eyes working, but she had lots of thoughts. "My mind is much faster than my eyes right now," she thought. "It's a raindrop for certain. But it's moving slowly, and it's not going straight down."

Then the rain drop sort of stopped. Not quite. It was like it hiccuped. Then it went in a different direction, across a little. As though it had changed its mind. "Do rain drops change their minds?" Laura wondered. There was something else about this rain drop. It was alone. No other rain drops.

"When it rains there are lots of rain drops. That's funny, if there was just one rain drop, is it raining? What about if there were just two rain drops, is it raining then? How many rain drops does it have to be, to be raining?" she asked herself.

This was a slow rain drop and it was going in different directions.

"Of course, it's on the window! If my eyes were working properly I could see that," Laura thought. Just then her eyes started to see. There was the drop, on the window. The window was not clear. There were smudges on it, and Laura could see lots of tiny, tiny bits of dust all over it. Except on one part of the window, where there was a clear line. "That's where the rain drop went! It left a trail."

She could see the glass pane and the drop. "I must be close to the window," she thought. "But where am I?"

She was puzzled.

There was a sound. Beep, Beep, Beep, Beep, Beep, Beep, Beep! It sounded far away. It was going on and on and on.

"That's a morning sound. I'm waking up," Laura thought.

"If I'm waking up then I must have been asleep. And if I've been asleep, I must be in bed." She felt the sheets. "I am in bed. And I am also close to a window. But I don't know where this bed is!"

For a minute Laura felt scared. How could she not know where she was? Could you forget where you are?

Then she remembered, she was in her new room. Her very own room. She looked around. It was much smaller than the other room. In fact it was more like a big closet than a real room. But she was in her own bed. Right up next to the window. She could lie in her bed and look right out of the window. Or she could look right at the window.

Laura tried that. First she looked right through the window. Then she looked right at the window. "I wonder if I can do both at the same time?" She looked really hard. Now it seemed that the rain drop was moving in and out!

"Maybe I could look at the window with one eye, and out of the window with my other eye," she thought.

Just as she was starting to try, Bang! The door opened.

"You're supposed to be dressed, Dreamy head!" It was her brother.

Paul was always dressed first. Paul did most things he was supposed to. But Paul was older. So he was better at most things anyway. Well that was what Paul said!

Mom had told them that Paul was born first. But only three minutes first! Paul said that first was first.

"Mom, did you ever not know where you are?"

Mom laughed. "Yes sweet-heart. Lots of times. Every time I have to drive to a new client's office I get lost. That's why I've got all of those maps in the car."

Laura screwed up her face. "It's so hard to say what you mean. All the time you say something, and the grown-ups talk to you like you said something else," she thought.

"I don't mean if you're lost, I mean, I mean if you're like, um, no-where!"

"That's where I'm going these days, nowhere! Maybe I'll meet you there," Dad said with a humph sound.

Laura thought, "Grown-ups get so dumb! Dad pretends he's talking to me, but he's looking at Mom. Then they say, "Now pay attention and look at me when I'm talking to you." "They always say that when you're not talking to them."

"Funny child," Mom said smiling, "You can't be nowhere, you've got to be somewhere. If you don't know where you are, you are lost. And what do you do when you're lost?..."

Laura could hear her Mom's voice but it sounded away, far away. Sometimes Mom's voice sounded kind of like the teacher's, and it sort of faded away. Like the sirens on the police cars.

"If you can't be nowhere, how can Daddy say he's going nowhere?" Laura wondered. "Mom didn't tell Daddy that you can't go nowhere. It doesn't make sense. You can go to school, and when you get there you can be at school. You can go to the store and when you get there you would be at the store. You can go somewhere, and Mom says you have to be somewhere. So how is it you can go nowhere, but you can't be nowhere!" Paul and Laura were walking to school. They went down to the entrance of the apartment building. John was waiting there. John walked to school with them because he was in fifth grade. They turned left, then they went to the corner and turned left. And then they walked a bit to where the crossing guard was. He stopped all the cars for them to cross the road and go into school.

In class, the teacher said, "Could somebody be a little helper today and pass out the drawing paper?"

Lots of kids had their hands raised. Paul was saying, "Ooh, Ooh, Ooh!" Paul loved drawing. He knew that if he could pass the paper out really fast, there would be more time for drawing.

"Alright, Paul and Marsha," said the teacher.

Paul picked up the pile of paper. There was a high squealing sound.

Squeeeck, fumpf, "Would Mrs. Korvitz please come to the office!" said a voice from the box on the wall.

The kids all moved about in their seats. All, except for Laura. She was looking at the window. It was a huge window. Much bigger than any window in the apartment.

"Just think of all the things you could see from this window!" Laura thought to herself. But always the green blinds were over the window. Only a little bit of window was left at the bottom.

Mrs. Korvitz called to the next classroom, "Mr. Kent, could you keep an eye on my class for two minutes?"

Laura looked over to the door. She could see Mr. Kent in the room across the hall.

"Now I'll watch what he does," she thought. "Maybe he can look one place with one eye and another place with the other eye."

"Children, I want you to start your drawing of the magic garden," said Mrs. Korvitz, "And nobody is to move till I get back!"

Paul had already started his drawing. In the magic garden birds were growing from the ground. Huge green and blue and red birds. Paul had seen pictures of gardens. The

yellow crayon was moving all over the page. There would be sun all over a magic garden. And a space ship. There was no room for a big space ship, so Paul put a space ship in the corner. A very, very small space ship.

"What's that supposed to be?" said Martha.

"They're birds."

"Birds don't look like that; they have wings."

"These are magic birds."

"That's the space ship."

Some other kids came over. "Gardens don't have space ships!" "Ha, ha, ha, ha," shouted Tommy, pretending to laugh. "This is a magic garden; the birds go away in the space ship," Paul said.

Loretta said, "I'm drawing flowers and a rainbow."

"So am I," said Michael. Though Michael hadn't drawn anything.

Plink, plink, plink, plink! They could hear Mrs. Korvitz shoes coming down the hall. All the kids ran back to their seats and sat down.

"Was everyody good?" asked Mrs. Korvitz.

"Paul's drawing a space ship," said Tommy.

"And I'm drawing flowers and a rainbow," said Loretta.

"So am I," "So am I," lots of kids called out. The whole class was drawing except for Laura.

"Would somebody like to share their drawing with the class?" asked Mrs. Korvitz. No one answered. Everyone was busy drawing.

"What, Nobody?" said Mrs. Korvitz. Laura was thinking, "somebody, nobody. That's like somewhere and nowhere. There's some body some where. There's no body no where. It didn't work. But why not?"

"What about you, Laura?" said Mrs. Korvitz. "You look as though you must be finished."

Laura looked up. She hadn't started. "There's no-body no-where," she said. She didn't know why she said it. the words just came out of her mouth.

"That's funny," she thought, "this morning I couldn't say what I meant. Now I just said something I didn't mean. I don't know what I said. How can that happen?"

Mrs. Korvitz looked a little sad. "Now, Laura, we have to pay attention," she said softly. "I want you to wait after school today."

Paul looked at his sister. "Do I have to wait too?" he asked the teacher. "Oh, yes," said Mrs. Korvitz, "you have to walk home together, don't you? Yes, you wait too."

"Does John have to wait too?"

Mrs. Korvitz sighed, "I'll tell the office."

iii

School was finished. Laura got her coat from the hook, and got in the line with the other kids.

"Laura," Paul said, "we have to wait after school, Mrs. Korvitz said." Paul remembered things.

"Now Laura and Paul," Mrs. Korvitz said, "I want you to take this note, and be sure to give it to your parents when they come home."

"Is that all?" Paul asked.

Mrs. Korvitz smiled. "Yes," she said, "You can go home now."

Paul and Laura ran up the hall. "No running!" said a voice. So they walked to the main door, then they ran to where the crossing guard was. They had to wait. The other kids had all crossed the road.

Laura looked across the street. There were two big old buildings on the other side.

And in between was a narrow alley. Laura knew that the alley went back into an empty lot. From their apartment Paul and Laura could look down into this piece of ground. There was hardly ever any sun there. The alley was very dark and narrow. On both sides were walls with no windows.

They crossed the street. On the ground Laura could see bits of garbage, an old broken umbrella, paper, some cans, some other stuff which looked shiny like metal.

Then she saw it!

A movement!

In the garbage.

Something small moved.

An animal?

iv

As soon as they got home, Paul put the note on the fridge. Laura went to the window. She was looking for something very small. It was a long way down, but if she looked really hard she could see bits of grass. There was one tree. A thin tree. She was sure she could see something move.

Tomorrow was Saturday, so maybe she could go down and look better, when Mom and Dad were home.

Paul had his drawing of the magic garden. Paul's drawings were all over the fridge door. He'd have to take one down to put the magic garden up.

They heard the key. Laura and Paul ran to the apartment door.

"Daddy, Daddy!" they shouted, and tried to climb up onto him.

"Hey, hold up there," Daddy said. "Let me come in, you two. How are my terrible twins this evening? Get in any trouble today?"

"Daddy always goes to the fridge to get some juice!" Paul thought.

"I wonder what kind of animal lives down there?" thought Laura.

Paul watched his father open the fridge door. He saw the note from school. He took it down. The fridge door was still open.

"Well, your mother will have to go, I have a late meeting on Thursday," he said.

Laura did not know what he was talking about. Paul asked, "Go where?"

"Mrs. Korvitz would like a conference with us," their father said.

Paul thought, "Mommy's always going to conferences. Maybe Mrs. Korvitz wants to go too."

Laura asked, "Daddy, can I go down to the lot tomorrow? I want to look for something."

"Why sure, honey. As long as we can see you from the window."

CHAPTER TWO

i

It was Saturday. Paul woke up. "No school today," he thought. Paul was getting dressed. At the same time he was planning what he would do.

Mom had brought him long cardboard tubes she used at work. Dad had told Paul that Mom drew big buildings at work. Then the builders copied her drawings, and made new huge buildings. Mom's buildings were all over the state.

Paul was proud of his Mom. So he had drawn a space ship. He was going to build it in the bedroom with the old boxes and tubes. It would be a surprise for his Mom and Dad.

He went into the kitchen. There was yogurt in the fridge for breakfast. On Saturdays Mom and Dad slept in their bed till nine o'clock. Paul thought that was

strange.

"There's so much to do, why would anyone want to lie in bed?" he thought.

He liked Saturdays. He was the only person up. For a while the whole apartment was his. He walked into the tv room and sat in Dad's chair.

Dad's chair was in front of the tv. It was a big chair, and it had a handle on the side. You could push the handle and the bottom of the chair came up. Dad slept in this chair every evening. Though he said he was watching tv.

Paul crawled behind the chair. He wanted to find out how it worked. It was too heavy to lift up. But if he went flat on the floor he could squeeze under it, and look at the bits underneath.

Once he had gotten stuck.

He had to wait till Laura came in and found him with his head stuck under the chair!

She had pulled and pulled on his feet. But she couldn't pull him out.

Then she went into Mom and Dad's room and made them get out of bed.

Dad had been cross. But Mom had laughed. "He sure is your son," she had said to Dad. Then Dad laughed too. He lifted the chair, and Paul came out.

Laura had asked, "Mom, am I your daughter?"

Mom said, "Why of course, darling, we're all one family. You know you were both born together in the hospital."

Dad had looked at Mom. "Sometimes I wonder," he had said. "Do you think there was a mix-up at the hospital?"

"Don't tease," said Mom. "They're too young."

Paul was thinking about that as he sat in Dad's chair. He understood what teasing was. Maybe it was because he was older. When Dad said strange things, grown-ups laughed. Laura didn't laugh.

But he had things to do. So he thought, "I'd better tell Laura to get dressed. If I don't tell her she might forget."

ii

Laura was sitting on her bed, in her pajamas. She was thinking about small animals.

"Marsha has a gerbil," she thought. Marsha had talked about her gerbil in school. It was small and had brown and white fur. It had a kind of pointy nose which twitched. It made squeaking sounds and ran fast when Marsha let it out of its cage.

It wasn't supposed to come out of its cage, Marsha had told the class.

"Why do animals have to be in cages?" Laura wondered.

"It would be awful to have to live in a cage all your life," she thought. "Always looking at the same things. You would never see what's outside. Well, maybe a little if there was a window. But you would never feel the rain. Or the wind. You would never know what it was like when leaves fell down off the trees. In Fall."

She could hear the wind," she thought, "but can you see the wind?"

Laura looked out the window.

She could see the garbage blowing. Bits of old newspaper would fly up and catch on the side of the building.

"I can hear the wind, so I know that it's there. So it's somewhere, it's not nowhere. But I can't see it. So is it a something? Or is it a nothing?"

Laura was trying to figure out if the wind was a something when Paul came in. "He always arrives when things are getting interesting," she thought.

Before he could say she should get dressed, Laura asked Paul, "Is the wind a something?"

Paul was thinking, "When we were really little, before we went to school, Dad used to read us stories. Laura would always ask questions."

Paul always wanted to hear the end of the story. He remembered a story about the wind.

"The wind must be something, or there wouldn't be a picture of it in a book," Paul said.

"But that's a baby book," Laura said. "Baby books have pictures of all sorts of things that aren't real."

Laura knew what Paul was thinking of. She nearly always knew what Paul was thinking of, and Paul nearly always knew what Laura was thinking of.

Before the twins had started school, Paul had thought that all children knew what other children were thinking of.

Now he knew better.

Paul wondered about the picture of the garden he had seen.

A Very Important Visitor had come to the school. He went to every class. He had a huge book full of pictures. It was the biggest book Paul had ever seen. The man showed the pictures, and he talked. There was one Paul liked more than all the others. It was a garden.

The man had said it was a real garden. In France. When he had gone, the teacher had shown them France on the globe in the corner of the classroom. France was a long, long way away.

Paul had never seen a garden. "Maybe things are different a long way away," he thought. "If that was a picture in a book. And there was a picture of the wind in a book, then maybe the wind looks like that in some country a long, long way away."

iii

Laura started to get dressed. Mom and Dad were so happy with the twins, now that they could get dressed, and get some breakfast for themselves. Laura didn't want to let them down, so she hurried into the kitchen without tying the laces of her sneakers. She just got her cereal into a plate when Mom came in. No time to pick up the flakes of cereal she had spilled.

Mom switched on the coffee maker.

"I'm going down to the lot," Laura said with her mouth full of cereal.

On a weekday, Mom would have told her not to eat with her mouth full. But on a Saturday morning, it was different.

"Yes Dear-heart. Stay in sight of the window, so I can see you."

Laura gulped down her cereal and ran out of the kitchen, before Mom could change her mind.

"Tie up those laces!" Mom called.

Laura stopped to tie her laces. Tommy had new sneakers with no laces. "That would be better," Laura thought. But she knew she couldn't get any new sneakers till these ones were too small for her.

She ran down the stairs, two steps at a time. Then she jumped the bottom four steps to the lobby. There was a narrow door at the back of the lobby which went out into the lot. Laura pushed at the door. This door was always hard to open. It was supposed to be locked, Laura knew. But no-one ever went there. Once there had been some flowers, Dad had said. But now there wasn't even any real grass, just flat earth.

"Even though nobody comes here," Laura thought, "there are always new things. Well, not exactly new things. The broken pail at the side of the tree isn't new, it's old, but it wasn't here before. I wonder how it got here?"

"The wind couldn't have blown that pail in here," she thought. She was standing looking at the pail, and the bits of paper, and the cans, and one old black shoe. "Only one shoe," she thought. "Shoes always come in pairs, how-come there's only one?" As she was

thinking about looking for the other shoe, she saw something out of the corner of her eye.

A movement!

Over in the pile of garbage by the wall.

Laura stood very still.

Then she saw it!

A small animal was moving in the garbage.

Laura knelt down. She didn't want to frighten the animal. Very, very slowly she went closer.

It was bigger than her foot. It looked right at her. It had small black eyes. And whiskers. Its nose was pointy, and it twitched.

Laura stayed completely still.

The animal froze still too.

She looked at it. It looked at her. It had beautiful shiny brown fur. And it was shaped just like the rain drop on her window, only sideways. With four legs. Skinny legs. And a long skinny tail.

"A gerbil!" Laura thought.

iv

A gerbil, in the lot!

"I'll call it Gerald Gerbil," Laura thought. "Of course, if it's a woman gerbil it'll have to have a different name--Geraldine Gerbil. If it's a woman gerbil, maybe there are some baby gerbils too! Then I'll have to give them names."

Laura thought for a moment, "I don't see any babies, so probably it's a male gerbil. So for now, I'll call it Gerald!"

Laura stayed completely still watching the animal. She was thinking about gerbil names. The animal was looking at her. Its nose was twitching. Then suddenly it turned around and ran into the garbage by the wall.

"It's disappeared!" Laura thought. "I wonder where it lives?"

Laura was thinking about where gerbils live.

"Where do they sleep?" she wondered. "Marsha's gerbil sleeps in its cage in a sort of nest."

Marsha had told the class that her gerbil had to have special straw to sleep in. And it had special food from the pet shop. Marsha had to give it food everyday.

"Where does this gerbil get its food?" Laura wondered. "Does anyone feed it, or buy it food?"

Just then she heard Mom calling from the kitchen window. It had started to rain. So Laura had to go inside.

Catherine McCall