LOUISE FITZHUGH

Harriet the Spy

COLLINS MODERN *CLASSICS*

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Harriet the Spy

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First published by HarperCollinsUS in 1964, this classic children’s novel has sold over 4 million copies and was awarded the New York Times Outstanding Book Award.Sixth-grader Harriet attends school on the New York's Upper East Side along with her two best pals, Sport and Janie. After school every day, she takes her notebook and proceeds through her spy route. Harriet observes the rich lady who never gets out of bed; the man with twenty-five cats and the Italian family who runs a grocery store. She writes brutally honest notes on them all. Harriet's downfall is that she also writes notes about people she actually knows…After a game in the park when her notebook is knocked out of her hands and read by her classmates, Harriet's innermost thoughts are revealed and she is shunned by all her classmates, who form the Spycatcher's Club. After her parents find out what's happened, Harriet receives a final, crushing blow. She is no longer allowed to take notes – her parents, her teacher and even the cook search her every day for a contraband notebook. Harriet's only consolation is the love and the wise advice of her nanny who manages to get her through this difficult period in her life.A classic in the US where it was first published and a major motion film from Paramount, Harriet the Spy is a beloved book throughout the world.

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OLLINS MODERN *CLASS*

Harriet the spy

Copyright

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Postscript by Wendy Cooling
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Book One

Chapter One

HARRIET WAS TRYING to explain to Sport how to play Town. “See, first you make up the name of the town. Then you write down the names of all the people who live in it. You can’t have too many or it gets too hard. I usually have twenty-five.”

“Ummmm.” Sport was tossing a football in the air. They were in the courtyard of Harriet’s house on East Eighty-seventh Street in Manhattan.

“Then when you know who lives there, you make up what they do. For instance, Mr Charles Hanley runs the filling station on the corner.” Harriet spoke thoughtfully as she squatted next to the big tree, bending so low over her notebook that her long straight hair touched the edges.

“Don’tcha wanta play football?” Sport asked.

“Now, listen, Sport, you never did this and it’s fun. Now over here next to this curve in the mountain we’ll put the filling station. So if anything happens there, you remember where it is.”

Sport tucked the football under his arm and walked over to her. “That’s nothing but an old tree root. Whaddya mean, a mountain?”

“That’s a mountain. From now on that’s a mountain. Got it?” Harriet looked up into his face.

Sport moved back a pace. “Looks like an old tree root,” he muttered.

Harriet pushed her hair back and looked at him seriously. “Sport, what are you going to be when you grow up?”

“You know what. You know I’m going to be a ball player.”

“Well, I’m going to be a writer. And when I say that’s a mountain, that’s a mountain.” Satisfied, she turned back to her town.

Sport put the football gently on the ground and knelt beside her, looking over her shoulder at the notebook in which she scribbled furiously.

“Now, as soon as you’ve got all the men’s names down, and their wives’ names and their children’s names, then you figure out all their professions. You’ve got to have a doctor, a lawyer—”

“And an Indian chief,” Sport interrupted.

“No. Someone who works in television.”

“What makes you think they have television?”

“I say they do. And, anyway, my father has to be in it, doesn’t he?”

“Well, then put mine in too. Put a writer in it.”

“OK, we can make Mr Jonathan Fishbein a writer.”

“And let him have a son like me who cooks for him.” Sport rocked back and forth on his heels, chanting in singsong, “And let him be eleven years old like me, and let him have a mother who went away and has all the money, and let him grow up to be a ball player.”

“Nooo,” Harriet said in disgust. “Then you’re not making it up. Don’t you understand?”

Sport paused. “No,” he said.

“Just listen, Sport. See, now that we have all this written down, I’ll show you where the fun is.” Harriet got very businesslike. She stood up, then got on her knees in the soft September mud so she could lean over the little valley made between the two big roots of the tree. She referred to her notebook every now and then, but for the most part she stared intently at the mossy lowlands which made her town. “Now, one night, late at night, Mr Charles Hanley is in his filling station. He is just about to turn out the lights and go home because it is nine o’clock and time for him to get ready for bed.”

“But he’s a grown-up!” Sport looked intently at the spot occupied by the gas station.

“In this town everybody goes to bed at nine-thirty,” Harriet said definitely.

“Oh” – Sport rocked a little on his heels – “my father goes to bed at nine in the morning. Sometimes I meet him getting up.”

“And also, Dr Jones is delivering a baby to Mrs Harrison right over here in the hospital. Here is the hospital, the Carterville General Hospital.” She pointed to the other side of town. Sport looked at the left root.

“What is Mr Fishbein, the writer, doing?”

Harriet pointed to the centre of town. “He is in the town bar, which is right here.” Harriet looked down at the town as though hypnotised. “Here’s what happens. Now, this night, as Mr Hanley is just about to close up, a long, big old black car drives up and in it there are all these men with guns. They drive in real fast and Mr Hanley gets scared. They jump out of the car and run over and rob Mr Hanley, who is petrified. They steal all the money in the gas station, then they fill up with gas free and then they zoom off in the night. Mr Hanley is all bound and gagged on the floor.”

Sport’s mouth hung open. “Then what?”

“At this same minute Mrs Harrison’s baby is born and Dr Jones says, ‘You have a fine baby girl, Mrs Harrison, a fine baby girl, ho, ho, ho.’”

“Make it a boy.”

“No, it’s a girl. She already has a boy.”

“What does the baby look like?”

“She’s ugly. Now, also at this very minute, on the other side of town, over here past the gas station, almost to the mountain, the robbers have stopped at a farmhouse which belongs to Ole Farmer

Dodge. They go in and find him eating oatmeal because he doesn't have any teeth. They throw the oatmeal on the floor and demand some other food. He doesn't have anything but oatmeal, so they beat him up. Then they settle down to spend the night. Now, at this very minute, the police chief of Carterville, who is called Chief Herbert, takes a stroll down the main street. He senses something is not right and he wonders what it is …"

"*Harriet*. Get up out of that mud." A harsh voice rang out from the third floor of the brownstone behind them.

Harriet looked up. There was a hint of anxiety in her face. "Oh, Ole Golly, I'm not in the mud."

The face of the nurse looking out of the window was not the best-looking face in the world, but for all its frowning, its sharp, dark lines, there was kindness there. "Harriet M. Welsch, you are to rise to your feet."

Harriet rose without hesitation. "But, listen, we'll have to play Town standing up," she said plaintively. "That's the best way" came back sharply, and the head disappeared.

Sport stood up too. "Why don't we play football, then?"

"No, look, if I just sit like this I won't be in the mud." So saying, she squatted on her heels next to the town. "Now, he senses that there is something wrong—"

"How can he? He hasn't seen anything and it's all on the other side of town."

"He just feels it. He's a very *good* police chief."

"Well," Sport said dubiously.

"So, since he's the only policeman in town, he goes around and deputises everybody and he says to them, 'Something is fishy in this here town. I feel it in my bones,' and everybody follows him and they get on their horses—"

"*Horses!*" Sport shrieked.

"They get in the squad car and they drive around town until—"

"*Harriet*." The back door slammed and Ole Golly marched squarely towards them across the yard. Her long black shoes made a slap-slap noise on the brick.

"Hey, where are you going?" asked Harriet, jumping up. Because Ole Golly had on her outdoor things. Ole Golly just had indoor things and outdoor things. She never wore anything as recognisable as a skirt, a jacket, or a sweater. She just had yards and yards of tweed which enveloped her like a lot of discarded blankets, which ballooned out when she walked, and which she referred to as her Things.

"I'm going to take you somewhere. It's time you began to see the world. You're eleven years old and it's time you saw something." She stood there above them, so tall that when they looked up they saw the blue sky behind her head.

Harriet felt a twinge of guilt because she had seen a lot more than Ole Golly thought she had. But all she said was, "Oh, boy," and jumped up and down.

"Get your coat and hurry. We're leaving right now." Ole Golly always did everything right now. "Come on, Sport, it won't hurt you to look around too."

"I have to be back at seven to cook dinner." Sport jumped up as he said this.

"We'll be back long before that. Harriet and I eat at six. Why do you eat so late?"

"He has cocktails first. I have olives and peanuts."

"That's nice. Now go get your coats."

Sport and Harriet ran through the back door, slamming it behind them.

"What's all the noise?" spluttered the cook, who whirled around just in time to see them fly through the kitchen door and up the back stairs. Harriet's room was at the top of the house, so they had three flights to run up and they were breathless by the time they got there.

"Where're we going?" Sport shouted after Harriet's flying feet.

"I don't know," Harriet panted as they entered her room, "but Ole Golly always has good places."

Sport grabbed his coat and was out the door and halfway down the steps when Harriet said, “Wait, wait, I can’t find my notebook.”

“Oh, whadya need that for?” Sport yelled from the steps.

“I never go anywhere without it,” came the muffled answer.

“Aw, come on, Harriet.” There were great cracking noises coming from the bedroom. “Harriet? Did you fall down?”

A muffled but very relieved voice came out. “I found it. It must have slipped behind the bed.” And Harriet emerged clutching a green composition book.

“You must have a hundred of them now,” Sport said as they went down the steps.

“No, I have fourteen. This is number fifteen. How could I have a hundred? I’ve only been working since I was eight, and I’m only eleven now. I wouldn’t even have this many except at first I wrote so big my regular route took almost the whole book.”

“You see the same people every day?”

“Yes. This year I have the Dei Santi family, Little Joe Curry, the Robinsons, Harrison Withers and a new one, Mrs Plumber. Mrs Plumber is the hardest because I have to get in the dumbwaiter.”

“Can I go with you sometime?”

“No, silly. Spies don’t go with friends. Anyway, we’d get caught if there were two of us. Why don’t you get your own route?”

“Sometimes I watch out my window a window across the way.”

“What happens there?”

“Nothing. A man comes home and pulls the shade down.”

“That’s not very exciting.”

“It sure isn’t.”

They met Ole Golly waiting for them, tapping her foot, outside the front door. They walked to Eighty-sixth Street, took the cross-town bus, and soon were whizzing along in the subway, sitting in a line – Ole Golly, then Harriet, then Sport. Ole Golly stared straight ahead. Harriet was scribbling furiously in her notebook.

“What are you writing?” Sport asked.

“I’m taking notes on all those people who are sitting over there.”

“Why?”

“Aw, Sport” – Harriet was exasperated – “because I’ve *seen* them and I want to *remember* them.” She turned back to her book and continued her notes:

MAN WITH ROLLED WHITE SOCKS, FAT LEGS. WOMAN WITH ONE CROSS-EYE AND A LONG NOSE. HORRIBLE LOOKING LITTLE BOY AND A FAT BLONDE MOTHER WHO KEEPS WIPING HIS NOSE OFF. FUNNY LADY LOOKS LIKE A TEACHER AND IS READING. I DON’T THINK I’D LIKE TO LIVE WHERE ANY OF THESE PEOPLE LIVE OR DO THE THINGS THEY DO. I BET THAT LITTLE BOY IS SAD AND CRIES A LOT. I BET THAT LADY WITH THE CROSS-EYE LOOKS IN THE MIRROR AND JUST FEELS TERRIBLE.

Ole Golly leaned over and spoke to them. “We’re going to Far Rockaway. It’s about three stops from here. I want you to see how this person lives, Harriet. This is *my* family.”

Harriet almost gasped. She looked up at Ole Golly in astonishment, but Ole Golly just stared out the window again. Harriet continued to write:

THIS IS INCREDIBLE. COULD OLE GOLLY HAVE A FAMILY? I NEVER THOUGHT ABOUT IT. HOW COULD OLE GOLLY HAVE A MOTHER AND FATHER? SHE’S TOO OLD FOR ONE THING AND SHE’S NEVER SAID ONE WORD ABOUT THEM AND I’VE KNOWN HER SINCE I WAS BORN. ALSO SHE DOESN’T GET ANY LETTERS. THINK ABOUT THIS. THIS MIGHT BE IMPORTANT.

They came to their stop and Ole Golly led them off the subway.

"Gee," said Sport as they came up on to the sidewalk, "we're near the ocean." And they could smell it, the salt, and even a wild soft spray which blew gently across their faces, then was gone.

"Yes," said Ole Golly briskly. Harriet could see a change in her. She walked faster and held her head higher.

They were walking down a street that led to the water. The houses, set back from the sidewalk with a patch of green in front, were built of yellow brick interspersed with red. It wasn't very pretty, Harriet thought, but maybe they liked their houses this way, better than those plain red brick ones in New York.

Ole Golly was walking faster and looking sterner. She looked as though she wished she hadn't come. Abruptly she turned in at a sidewalk leading to a house. She strode relentlessly up the steps, never looking back, never saying a word. Sport and Harriet followed, wide-eyed, up the steps to the front door, through the front hall, and out the back door.

She's lost her mind, Harriet thought. She and Sport looked at each other with raised eyebrows. Then they saw that Ole Golly was heading for a small private house which sat in its own garden behind the apartment house. Harriet and Sport stood still, not knowing what to do. This little house was like a house in the country, the kind Harriet saw when she went to Water Mill in the summer. The unpainted front had the same soft grey of driftwood, the roof a darker grey.

"Come on, chickens, let's get us a hot cup of tea." Ole Golly, suddenly gay, waved from the funny little rotting porch.

Harriet and Sport ran towards the house, but stopped cold when the front door opened with a loud swish. There, suddenly, was the largest woman Harriet had ever seen.

"Why, lookahere what's coming," she bellowed, "looka them lil rascals," and her great fat face crinkled into large cheerful lumps as her mouth split to show a toothless grin. She let forth a high burbling laugh.

Sport and Harriet stood staring, their mouths open. The fat lady stood like a mountain, her hands on her hips, in a flowered cotton print dress and enormous hanging coat sweater. Probably the biggest sweater in the world, thought Harriet; probably the biggest pair of shoes too. And her shoes were a wonder. Long, long, black, bumpy things with high, laced sides up to the middle of the shin, bulging with the effort of holding in those ankles, their laces splitting them into grins against the white of the socks below. Harriet fairly itched to take notes on her.

"Wherecha get these lil things?" Her cheer rang out all over the neighbourhood. "This the lil Welsch baby? That her brother?"

Sport giggled.

"No, it's my husband," Harriet shouted.

Ole Golly turned a grim face. "Don't be snarky, Harriet, and don't think you're such a wit either."

The fat lady laughed, making her face fall in lumps again. She looks like dough, Harriet thought, about to be made into a big round Italian loaf. She wanted to tell Sport this, but Ole Golly was leading them in, all of them squeezing past that mountain of a stomach because the fat lady stood, rather stupidly, in the doorway.

Ole Golly marched to the teakettle and put a fire under it. Then she turned in a businesslike way and introduced them. "Children, this is my mother, Mrs Golly. Mother – you can close the door now, Mother. This is Harriet Welsch."

"Harriet M. Welsch," Harriet corrected.

"You know perfectly well you have no middle name, but if you insist, Harriet M. Welsch. And this is Sport. What's your last name, Sport?"

"Rocque. Simon Rocque." He pronounced it Rock.

"Simon, Simon, hee, hee, hee." Harriet felt very ugly all of a sudden.

"You are not to make fun of anyone's name." Ole Golly loomed over Harriet and it was one of those times when Harriet knew she meant it.

"I take it back," Harriet said quickly.

"That's better." Ole Golly turned away cheerfully. "Now let's all sit down and have some tea."

"Waal, ain't she a cute lil thing." Harriet could see that Mrs Golly was still hung up on the introductions. She stood like a mountain, her big ham hands dangling helplessly at her sides.

"Sit down, Mother," Ole Golly said gently, and Mrs Golly sat.

Harriet and Sport looked at each other. The same thought was occurring to both of them. This fat lady wasn't very bright.

Mrs Golly sat to the left of Harriet. She leaned over Harriet, in fact, and looked directly into her eyes. Harriet felt like something in a zoo.

"Now, Harriet, look around you," Ole Golly said sternly as she poured the tea. "I brought you here because you've never seen the inside of a house like this. Have you ever seen a house that has one bed, one table, four chairs, and a bathtub in the kitchen?"

Harriet had to move her chair back to see around Mrs Golly, who leaned towards her, motionless, still looking. The room *was* a strange one. There was a sad little rug next to the stove. Harrison Withers has only a bed and a table, Harriet thought to herself. But since she didn't want Ole Golly to know she had been peering through Harrison Withers' skylight, she said nothing.

"I didn't think you had," said Ole Golly. "Look around. And drink your tea, children. You may have more milk and sugar if I haven't put enough."

"I don't drink tea," Sport said timidly.

Ole Golly shot an eye at him. "What do you mean you don't drink tea?"

"I mean I never have."

"You mean you've never tasted it?"

"No," said Sport and looked a little terrified.

Harriet looked at Ole Golly. Ole Golly wore an arch expression which signified that she was about to quote.

"'There are few hours in life more agreeable than the hour dedicated to the ceremony known as afternoon tea.'" Ole Golly said this steadily and sedately, then leaned back in her chair with a satisfied look at Sport. Sport looked completely blank.

"Henry James," said Ole Golly, "1843-1916. From *Portrait of a Lady*."

"What's that?" Sport asked Harriet.

"A novel, silly," said Harriet.

"Oh, like my father writes," said Sport, and dismissed the whole thing.

"My dotter's a smart one," mumbled Mrs Golly, still looking straight at Harriet.

"Behold, Harriet," Ole Golly said, "a woman who never had any interest in anyone else, nor in any book, nor in any school, nor in any way of life, but has lived her whole life in this room, eating and sleeping and waiting to die."

Harriet stared at Mrs Golly in horror. Should Ole Golly be saying these things? Wouldn't Mrs Golly get mad? But Mrs Golly just sat looking contentedly at Harriet. Perhaps, thought Harriet, she forgets to turn her head away from something unless she is told.

"Try it, Sport, it's good." Harriet spoke to Sport quickly in an effort to change the subject.

Sport took a sip. "It's not bad," he said weakly.

"Try everything, Sport, at least once." Ole Golly said this as though her mind weren't really on it. Harriet looked at her curiously. Ole Golly was acting very strangely indeed. She seemed … was she angry? No, not angry. She seemed sad. Harriet realised with a start that it was the first time she had ever seen Ole Golly look sad. She hadn't even known Ole Golly *could* be sad.

Almost as though she were thinking the same thing, Ole Golly suddenly shook her head and sat up straight. “Well,” she said brightly, “I think we have had enough tea and enough sights for one day. I think we had better go home now.”

The most extraordinary thing happened next. Mrs Golly leaped to her fat feet and threw her teacup down on the floor. “You’re always leaving. You’re always leaving,” she screamed.

“Now, Mother,” Ole Golly said calmly.

Mrs Golly hopped around the middle of the floor like a giant doll. She made Harriet think of those balloons, blown up like people, that bounce on the end of a string. Sport giggled suddenly. Harriet felt like giggling but wasn’t sure she should.

Mrs Golly bobbed away. “Just come here to leave me again. Always leaving. Thought you’d come for good this time.”

“Now, Mother,” Ole Golly said again, but this time got to her feet, walked to her mother, and laid a firm hand on the bouncing shoulder. “Mother,” she said gently, “you know I’ll be here next week.”

“Oh, that’s right,” said Mrs Golly. She stopped jumping immediately and gave a big smile to Harriet and Sport.

“Oh, boy,” said Sport under his breath.

Harriet sat fascinated. Then Ole Golly got them all bundled into their clothes and they were outside on the street again, having waved to a cheerful Mrs Golly. They walked along through the darkening day.

“Boy, oh, boy,” was all Sport could say.

Harriet couldn’t wait to get back to her room to finish her notes.

Ole Golly looked steadily ahead. There was no expression on her face at all.

Chapter Two

WHEN HARRIET WAS ready for bed that night, she took out her notebook. She had a lot to think about. Tomorrow was the beginning of school. Tomorrow she would have a quantity of notes to take on the changes that had taken place in her friends over the summer. Tonight she wanted to think about Mrs Golly.

I THINK THAT LOOKING AT MRS GOLLY MUST MAKE OLE GOLLY SAD. MY MOTHER ISN'T AS SMART AS OLE GOLLY BUT SHE'S NOT AS DUMB AS MRS GOLLY. I OULDN'T LIKE TO HAVE A DUMB MOTHER. IT MUST MAKE YOU FEEL VERY UNPOPULAR. I THINK I WOULD LIKE TO WRITE A STORY ABOUT MRS GOLLY GETTING RUN OVER BY A TRUCK EXCEPT SHE'S SO FAT I WONDER WHAT WOULD HAPPEN TO THE TRUCK. I HAD BETTER CHECK ON THAT. I WOULD NOT LIKE TO LIVE LIKE MRS GOLLY BUT I WOULD LIKE TO KNOW WHAT GOES ON IN HER HEAD.

Harriet put the book down and ran in to Ole Golly's room to kiss her good night. Ole Golly sat in a rocker in the light of an overhead lamp, reading. Harriet flew into the room and bounded right into the centre of the billowy yellow quilt which covered the single bed. Everything in the room was yellow, from the walls to the vase of chrysanthemums. Ole Golly "took to" yellow, as she put it.

"Take your feet off the bed," Ole Golly said without looking up.

"What does your mother think about?" asked Harriet.

"I don't know," said Ole Golly in a musing way, still looking at her book. "I've wondered that for years."

"What are you reading?" Harriet asked.

"Dostoyevsky."

"What's *that*?" asked Harriet in a thoroughly obnoxious way.

"Listen to this," Ole Golly said and got that quote look on her face: "'Love all God's creation, the whole and every grain of sand in it. Love every leaf, every ray of God's light. Love the animals, love the plants, love everything. If you love everything, you will perceive the divine mystery in things. Once you perceive it, you will begin to comprehend it better every day. And you will come at last to love the whole world with an all-embracing love.'"

"What does that mean?" Harriet asked after she had been quiet a minute. "What do you think it means?"

"Well, maybe if you love everything, then … then – I guess you'll know everything … then … seems like … you love everything more. I don't know. Well, that's about it …" Ole Golly looked at Harriet in as gentle a way as she could considering the fact that her face looked like it was cut out of oak.

"I want to know everything, everything," screeched Harriet suddenly, lying back and bouncing up and down on the bed. "Everything in the world, everything, everything. I will be a spy and know everything."

"It won't do you a bit of good to know everything if you don't do anything with it. Now get up, Miss Harriet the Spy, you're going to sleep now." And with that Ole Golly marched over and grabbed Harriet by the ear.

"Ouch," said Harriet as she was led to her room, but it really didn't hurt.

"There now, into bed."

"Will Mommy and Daddy be home in time to kiss me good night?"

"They will not," said Ole Golly as she tucked Harriet in. "They went to a party. You'll see them in the morning at breakfast. Now to sleep, instantly—"

"Hee, hee," said Harriet, "instant sleep."

"And not another word out of you. Tomorrow you go back to school." Ole Golly leaned over and gave her a hard little peck on the forehead. Ole Golly was never very kissy, which Harriet thought was just as well, as she hated it. Ole Golly turned the light out and Harriet listened to her go back into her room which was right across the hall, pick up her book, and sit down in the rocker again. Then Harriet did what she always did when she was supposed to be asleep. She got out her flashlight, put the book she was currently reading under the covers, and read happily until Ole Golly came in and took the flashlight away as she did every night.

The next morning Mrs Welsch asked, "Wouldn't you like to try a ham sandwich, or egg salad, or peanut butter?" Her mother looked quizzically at Harriet while the cook stood next to the table looking enraged.

"Tomato," said Harriet, not even looking up from the book she was reading at breakfast.

"Stop reading at the table." Harriet put the book down. "Listen, Harriet, you've taken a tomato sandwich to school every day for five years. Don't you get tired of them?"

"No."

"How about cream cheese and olive?"

Harriet shook her head. The cook threw up one arm in despair.

"Pastrami? Roast beef? Cucumber?"

"Tomato."

Mrs Welsch raised her shoulders and looked helplessly at the cook. The cook grimaced. “Set in her ways,” the cook said firmly and left the room. Mrs Welsch took a sip of coffee. “Are you looking forward to school?”

“Not particularly.”

Mr Welsch put the paper down and looked at his daughter. “Do you like school?”

“No,” said Harriet.

“I always hated it,” said Mr Welsch and went back behind the paper.

“Dear, you mustn’t say things like that. I rather liked it – that is, when I was eleven I did.” Mrs Welsch looked at Harriet as though expecting an answer.

Harriet didn’t know what she felt about school.

“Drink your milk,” said Mrs Welsch. Harriet always waited until her mother said this, no matter how thirsty she was. It made her feel comfortable to have her mother remind her. She drank her milk, wiped her mouth sedately, and got up from the table. Ole Golly came into the room on her way to the kitchen.

“What do you say when you get up from the table, Harriet?” Mrs Welsch asked absentmindedly.

“Excuse me,” said Harriet.

“Good manners are very important, particularly in the morning,” snapped Ole Golly as she went through the door. Ole Golly was always horribly grumpy in the morning.

Harriet ran very fast all the way up to her room. “I’m starting the sixth grade,” she yelled, just to keep herself company. She got her notebook, slammed her door, and thundered down the steps. “Goodbye, goodbye,” she yelled, as though she were going to Africa, and slammed out the front door.

Harriet’s school was called The Gregory School, having been founded by a Miss Eleanore Gregory around the turn of the century. It was on East End Avenue, a few blocks from Harriet’s house and across the street from Carl Schurz Park. Harriet skipped away down East End Avenue, hugging her notebook happily.

At the entrance to her school a group of children crowded through the door. More stood around on the sidewalk. They were all shapes and sizes and mostly girls because The Gregory School was a girls’ school. Boys were allowed to attend up through the sixth grade, but after that they had to go someplace else.

It made Harriet sad to think that after this year Sport wouldn’t be in school. She didn’t care about the others. In particular about Pinky Whitehead she didn’t care, because she thought he was the dumbest thing in the world. The only other boy in her class was a boy Harriet had christened The Boy with the Purple Socks, because he was so boring no one ever bothered to remember his name. He had come to the school last year and everyone else had been there since the first grade. Harriet remembered that first day when he had come in with those purple socks on. Whoever heard of purple socks? She figured it was lucky he wore them; otherwise no one would have even known he was there at all. He never said a word.

Sport came up to her as she leaned against a fire hydrant and opened her notebook. “Hi,” he said.

“Hi.”

“Anyone else here yet?”

“Just that dumb boy with the purple socks.”

Harriet wrote quickly in her notebook:

SOMETIMES SPORT LOOKS AS THOUGH HE’S BEEN UP ALL NIGHT. HE HAS FUNNY LITTLE DRY THINGS AROUND HIS EYES. I WORRY ABOUT HIM.

“Sport, did you wash your face?”

“Huh? Uh … no, I forgot.”

“Hmmmm,” Harriet said disapprovingly, and Sport looked away. Actually Harriet hadn’t washed hers either, but you couldn’t tell it.

"Hey, there's Janie." Sport pointed up the street.

Janie Gibbs was Harriet's best friend beside Sport. She had a chemistry set and planned one day to blow up the world. Both Harriet and Sport had a great respect for Janie's experiments, but they didn't understand a word she said about them.

Janie came slowly towards them, her eyes apparently focused on a tree across the street in the park. She looked odd walking that way, her head turned completely to the right like a soldier on parade. Both Sport and Harriet knew she did this because she was shy and didn't want to see anyone, so they didn't mention it.

She almost bumped into them.

"Hi."

"Hi."

"Hi."

That over, they all stood there.

"Oh, dear," said Janie, "another year. Another year older and I'm no closer to my goal."

Sport and Harriet nodded seriously. They watched a long black limousine driven by a chauffeur. It stopped in front of the school. A small blonde girl got out.

"There's that dreadful Beth Ellen Hansen," said Janie with a sneer. Beth Ellen was the prettiest girl in the class, so everyone despised her, particularly Janie, who was rather plain and freckled.

Harriet took some notes:

JANIE GETS STRANGER EVERY YEAR. I THINK SHE MIGHT BLOW UP THE WORLD. BETH ELLEN ALWAYS LOOKS LIKE SHE MIGHT CRY.

Rachel Hennessey and Marion Hawthorne came walking up together. They were always together. "Good morning, Harriet, Simon, Jane," Marion Hawthorne said very formally. She acted like a teacher, as though she were one minute from rapping on the desk for attention. Rachel did everything Marion did, so now she looked down her nose at them and nodded hello, one quick jerk of the head. The two of them went into the school then.

"Are they not too much?" Janie said and looked away in disgust.

Carrie Andrews got off the bus. Harriet wrote:

CARRIE ANDREWS IS CONSIDERABLY FATTER THIS YEAR.

Laura Peters got out of the station wagon bus. Harriet wrote:

AND LAURA PETERS IS THINNER AND UGLIER. I THINK SHE COULD USE SOME BRACES ON HER TEETH.

"Oh, boy," said Sport. They looked and there was Pinky Whitehead. Pinky was so pale, thin, and weak that he looked like a glass of milk, a tall thin glass of milk. Sport couldn't bear to look at him. Harriet turned away from habit, then looked back to see if he had changed. Then she wrote:

PINKY WHITEHEAD HAS NOT CHANGED. PINKY WHITEHEAD WILL NEVER CHANGE.

Harriet consulted her mental notes on Pinky. He lived on Eighty-eighth Street. He had a very beautiful mother, a father who worked on a magazine, and a baby sister three years old. Harriet wrote:

MY MOTHER IS ALWAYS SAYING PINKY WHITEHEAD'S WHOLE PROBLEM IS HIS MOTHER. I BETTER ASK HER WHAT THAT MEANS OR I'LL NEVER FIND OUT. DOES HIS MOTHER HATE HIM? IF I HAD HIM I'D HATE HIM.

"Well, it's time to go in," said Sport in a tired voice.

"Yeah, let's get this over with," said Janie and turned towards the door.

Harriet closed her notebook and they all went in. Their first period was Assembly in the big study hall.

Miss Angela Whitehead, the present dean, stood at the podium. Harriet scribbled in her notebook as soon as she took her seat:

MISS WHITEHEAD'S FEET LOOK LARGER THIS YEAR. MISS WHITEHEAD HAS BUCK TEETH, THIN HAIR, FEET LIKE SKIS, AND A VERY LONG HANGING STOMACH. OLE GOLLY SAYS DESCRIPTION IS GOOD FOR THE SOUL AND CLEARS THE BRAIN LIKE A LAXATIVE. THAT SHOULD TAKE CARE OF MISS WHITEHEAD.

"Good morning, children." Miss Whitehead bowed as gracefully as a pussy willow. The students rose in a shuffling body. "Good morning, Miss Whitehead," they intoned, an undercurrent of grumbling rising immediately afterwards like a second theme. Miss Whitehead made a short speech about gum and candy wrappers being thrown all over the school. She didn't see any reason for this. Then followed the readings. Every morning two or three older girls read short passages from books, usually the Bible. Harriet never listened. She got enough quotes from Ole Golly. She used this time to write in her book:

OLE GOLLY SAYS THERE IS AS MANY WAYS TO LIVE AS THERE ARE PEOPLE ON THE EARTH AND I SHOULDN'T GO ROUND WITH BLINDERS BUT SHOULD SEE EVERY WAY I CAN. THEN I'LL KNOW WHAT WAY I WANT TO LIVE AND NOT JUST LIVE LIKE MY FAMILY.

I'LL TELL YOU ONE THING, I DON'T WANT TO LIVE LIKE MISS WHITEHEAD. THE OTHER DAY I SAW HER IN THE GROCERY STORE AND SHE BOUGHT ONE SMALL CAN OF TUNA, ONE DIET COLA AND A PACKAGE OF CIGARETTES. NOT EVEN ONE TOMATO. SHE MUST HAVE A TERRIBLE LIFE. I CAN'T WAIT TO GET BACK TO MY REGULAR SPY ROUTE THIS AFTERNOON. I'VE BEEN AWAY ALL SUMMER AND THOSE HOUSES IN THE COUNTRY ARE TOO FAR AWAY FROM EACH OTHER. TO GET MUCH DONE I WOULD HAVE TO DRIVE.

Assembly was over. The class got up and filed into the sixth-grade room. Harriet grabbed a desk right across the aisle one way from Sport and the other way from Janie.

"Hey!" Sport said because he was glad. If they hadn't been able to grab these desks, it would have been hard passing notes.

Miss Elson stood at her desk. She was their homeroom teacher. Harriet looked at her curiously, then wrote:

I THINK MISS ELSON IS ONE OF THOSE PEOPLE YOU DON'T BOTHER TO THINK ABOUT TWICE.

She slammed the notebook shut as though she had put Miss Elson in a box and slammed the lid. Miss Elson called the roll and her voice squeaked: "Andrews, Gibbs, Hansen, Hawthorne, Hennessey, Matthews, Peters, Rocque, Welsch, Whitehead."

Everyone said, "Here," dutifully.

"And now, children, we will have the election for officer. Are there any nominations?"

Sport leaped to his feet. "I nominate Harriet Welsch."

Janie yelled, "I second it." They always did this every year because the one that was officer controlled everything. When the teacher went out of the room the officer could write down the names of anyone who was disorderly. The officer also got to be the editor of the Sixth Grade Page in the school paper.

Rachel Hennessey got up. "I nominate Marion Hawthorne," she said in her prissiest voice.

Marion Hawthorne shot Beth Ellen Hansen a look that made Harriet's hair stand on end. Beth Ellen looked terrified, then got timidly to her feet and, almost whispering, managed to stammer, "I second it." It was rigged, the whole thing, every year. There were no more nominations and then came the vote. Marion Hawthorne got it. Every year either Marion or Rachel Hennessey got it. Harriet wrote in her book:

YOU'D THINK THE TEACHERS WOULD SMELL A RAT BECAUSE IT'S FIVE YEARS NOW AND NEITHER ME NOR SPORT NOR JANIE HAS EVER GOTTEN IT.

Marion Hawthorne looked terribly smug. Sport, Janie, and Harriet scowled at each other. Janie whispered, “Our day will come. Just wait.” Harriet wondered if she meant that when she blew up the world Marion Hawthorne would see what they were made of. Or maybe Janie meant to blow up Marion Hawthorne first, which wasn’t a bad idea.

It was finally three thirty-seven and school was over. Sport came up to Harriet. “Hey, whyncha come over this afternoon?”

“After the spy route, maybe, if I’ve got time.”

“Aw, gee, Janie’s working in the lab. You both are always working.”

“Why don’t you practise? How’re you ever going to be a ball player?”

“Can’t. Have to clean the house. Come over if you get time.”

Harriet said, “OK,” then “goodbye,” and ran towards the house. It was time for her cake and milk. Every day at three-forty she had cake and milk. Harriet loved doing everything every day in the same way.

“Time for my cake, for my cake and milk, time for my milk and cake.” She ran yelling through the front door of her house. She ran through the front hall past the dining room and the living room and down the steps into the kitchen. There she ran smack into the cook.

“Like a missile you are, shot from that school,” screamed the cook.

“Hello cook, hello, cooky, hello, hello, hello, hello,” sang Harriet. Then she opened her notebook and wrote:

BLAH, BLAH, BLAH. I ALWAYS DO CARRY ON A LOT. ONCE OLE GOLLY SAID TO ME, “I COULD NEVER LOSE YOU IN A CROWD, I’D JUST FOLLOW THE SOUND OF YOUR VOICE.”

She slammed the notebook and the cook jumped. Harriet laughed.

The cook put the cake and milk in front of her. “What you always writing in that dad-blamed book for?” she asked with a sour little face.

“Because,” Harriet said around a bite of cake, “I’m a spy.”

“Spy, huh. Some spy.”

“I *am* a spy. I’m a *good* spy, too. I’ve never been caught.”

Cook settled herself with a cup of coffee. “How long you been a spy?”

“Since I could write. Ole Golly told me if I was going to be a writer I better write down everything, so I’m a spy that writes down everything.”

“Hmmmmmmph.” Harriet knew the cook couldn’t think of anything to say when she did that.

“I know all about you.”

“Like fun, you do.” The cook looked startled.

“I do too. I know you live with your sister in Brooklyn and that she might get married and you wish you had a car and you have a son that’s no good and drinks.”

“What do you do, child? Listen at doors?”

“Yes,” said Harriet.

“Well, I never,” said the cook. “I think that’s bad manners.”

“Ole Golly doesn’t. Ole Golly says find out everything you can ’cause life is hard enough even if you know a lot.”

“I bet she don’t know you spooking round this house listening at doors.”

“Well, how am I supposed to find out anything?”

“I don’t know,” – the cook shook her head – “I don’t know about that Ole Golly.”

‘What do you mean?” Harriet felt apprehensive.

“I don’t know. I just don’t know. I wonder about her.”

Ole Golly came into the room. “What is it you don’t know?”

Cook looked as though she might hide under the table. She stood up. “Can I get you your tea, Miss Golly?” she asked meekly.

"That would be most kind of you," said Ole Golly and sat down.

Harriet opened her notebook:

I WONDER WHAT THAT WAS ALL ABOUT. MAYBE OLE GOLLY KNOWS SOMETHING ABOUT COOK THAT COOK DOESN'T WANT HER TO KNOW. CHECK ON THIS.

"What do you have in school this year, Harriet?" asked Ole Golly.

"English, History, Geography, French, Math, ugh, Science, ugh, and the Performing Arts, ugh, ugh, ugh." Harriet rattled these off in a very bored way.

"What history?"

"Greeks and Romans, ugh, ugh, ugh."

"They're fascinating."

"What?"

"They are. Just wait, you'll see. Talk about spies. Those gods spied on everybody all the time."

"Yeah?"

"'Yes,' Harriet, not 'yeah'."

"Well, I wish *I'd* never heard of them."

"Ah, there's a thought from Aesop for you: 'We would often be sorry if our wishes were gratified.'" Ole Golly gave a little moo of satisfaction after she had delivered herself of this.

"I think I'll go now," Harriet said.

"Yes," said the cook, "go out and play."

Harriet stood up. "I do not go out to PLAY, I go out to WORK!" and in as dignified a way as possible she walked from the room and up the steps from the kitchen. Then she began to run, and running furiously, she went past the first floor with the living room and dining room, the second floor with her parents' bedroom and the library, and on up to the third floor to her little room and bath.

Harriet loved her room. It was small and cosy, and the bathroom was a little one with a tiny window which looked out over the park across the street. Her room had a bigger window. She looked around, pleased as always by the order, the efficiency of it. She always picked up everything immediately, not because anyone nagged at her – no one ever had – but because it was her room and she liked to have it just so. Harriet was just so about a lot of things. Her room stood around her pleasantly, waiting for her. Her own small bed next to the window, her bookcase filled with her books, her toy box, which had been filled with toys but which now held her notebooks because it could be locked, her desk and chair at which she did her homework – all seemed to look back at her with affection. Harriet put her books down on the desk and hurriedly began to change into her spy clothes.

Her spy clothes consisted first of all of an ancient pair of blue jeans, so old that her mother had forbidden her to wear them, but which Harriet loved because she had fixed up the belt with hooks to carry her spy tools. Her tools were a flashlight, in case she were ever out at night, which she never was, a leather pouch for her notebook, another leather case for extra pens, a water canteen, and a boy scout knife which had, among other features, a screwdriver and a knife and fork which collapsed. She had never had occasion to eat anywhere, but someday it might come in handy.

She attached everything to the belt, and it all worked fine except that she rattled a little. Next she put on an old dark-blue sweatshirt with a hood which she wore at the beach house in the summer so that it still smelled of salt air in a comforting way. Then she put on an old pair of blue sneakers with holes over each of her little toes. Her mother had actually gone so far as to throw these out, but Harriet had rescued them from the garbage when the cook wasn't looking.

She finished by donning a pair of black-rimmed spectacles with no glass in them. She had found these once in her father's desk and now sometimes wore them even to school, because she thought they made her look smarter.

She stood back and looked at herself in the full-length mirror which hung on her bathroom door. She was very pleased. Then she ran quickly down the steps and out, banging the front door behind her.

Chapter Three

SHE WAS PARTICULARLY excited as she ran along, because today she was adding a new spying place to her route. She had discovered a way into a private house around the corner. Private houses were much more difficult to get into than apartment buildings, and this was the first one Harriet had managed. It belonged to a Mrs Agatha K. Plumber who was a very strange, rather theatrical lady who had once married a man of considerable means. She was now divorced, lived alone, and apparently talked on the telephone all day. Harriet had found this much out from first listening to several conversations between Mrs Plumber's maid and an overly friendly garbage man. Harriet had pretended to play ball while the garbage was being picked up.

Just yesterday she had discovered that by timing it exactly she had just enough time to jump in the dumbwaiter and slide the door closed before the maid completed one of her frequent trips up and down the stairs. The dumbwaiter was no longer used but fortunately had not been boarded up. Since there was a small crack in the door, Harriet could see and hear perfectly.

She approached the house, looked through the kitchen windows, and saw the maid preparing a tray. She knew then that the next step would be to take the tray to the second floor. Not a moment to lose. The maid went into the pantry. Harriet stepped through the kitchen door and in one jump was in the dumbwaiter. She barely got the door slid down again before the maid was back in the room. The maid was humming "Miss Am-er-i-ker, look at her, Miss Amer-i-ker," in a tuneless sort of way.

Then the tray was ready. The maid picked it up and left the room. Simultaneously Harriet started pulling on the ropes that hoisted the dumbwaiter. Terrified, she heard a lot of creaking. This would never do. Maybe she could bring some oil.

She arrived at the second floor. Her heart was beating so fast she was almost unable to breathe. She looked through the crack. The first thing she saw was a huge four-poster bed in the middle of which Mrs Plumber sat, propped against immense pillows, telephone in hand, surrounded by magazines, books, candy boxes, and a litter of pink baby pillows.

"Well," Mrs Plumber was saying decisively into the telephone, "*I* have discovered the *secret of life*."

Wow, thought Harriet.

"My dear, it's very simple, you just *take* to your *bed*. You just refuse to leave it for *anything* or *anybody*."

Some secret, thought Harriet; that's the dumbest thing I ever heard of. Harriet hated bed anyway. In and out was her motto, and the less time there the better.

"Oh, yes, darling, I *know*. I *know* you *can't* run away from life, I *agree* with you. I *loathe* people that do that. But you see, I'm *not*. While I'm lying here I'm actually *working* because, you see, and this is the *divine* part, I'm *deciding* on a profession!"

You must be a hundred and two, thought Harriet; you better get going.

The maid came in with the tray. "Put it down there," said Mrs Plumber rather crossly, then went back to the phone.

Harriet wrote in her notebook:

IT'S JUST WHAT OLE GOLLY SAYS. RICH PEOPLE ARE BORING. SHE SAYS WHEN PEOPLE DON'T DO ANYTHING THEY DON'T THINK ANYTHING, AND WHEN THEY DON'T THINK ANYTHING THERE'S NOTHING TO THINK ABOUT THEM. IF I HAD A DUMBWAITER I WOULD LOOK IN IT ALL THE TIME TO SEE IF ANYBODY WAS IN IT.

As though she were reading Harriet's mind, Mrs Plumber said to the maid, "Did you hear a creak just now in that old dumbwaiter?"

"No, ma'am," said the maid.

"It was probably my imagination." She went back to the telephone. "My dear, I have *infinite* possibilities. Now don't you think I would make a *marv-e-llous* actress? Or there's *painting*; I could *paint*. What do you think of that? … Well, darling, I'm only *forty*, think of *Gauguin* …"

Harriet started, very slowly, heart pounding, to pull the ropes that would start her downwards. It had occurred to her that she'd better exit while Mrs Plumber was blathering away or she would certainly be heard. There was a tiny creak as she got near the bottom, but she was fairly certain no one heard it. There, the main floor. She peeked into the kitchen. Empty. Could she make it? She scrambled down and ran for her life.

I have never run so fast, she thought as she careened around the corner. Panting, she sat on some steps and took out her book.

I THINK THIS MIGHT BE TOO DANGEROUS AN ASSIGNMENT. BUT I WOULD LIKE TO KNOW WHAT JOB SHE TAKES. BUT HOW CAN YOU WORK LYING DOWN? HOW DOES SHE PAY FOR ANYTHING JUST LYING THERE? I GUESS SHE JUST LIVES ON HER HUSBAND'S MONEY. DOES MY MOTHER MOOCH OFF MY FATHER? I'LL NEVER DO THAT. LOOK AT POOR SPORT. HE HAS TOO MUCH TO DO ALREADY WITHOUT ME LYING UP IN THE BED ALL DAY EATING.

Harriet had three more stops before she was finished for the day, but before she continued she decided to stop by and see Sport. On the way there she got thirsty and stopped in her favourite luncheonette for an egg cream. It was her favourite because it was there that she had first begun to hear what peculiar things people say to each other. She liked to sit at the counter with her egg cream and let the voices from the tables behind her float over her head. Several conversations were always

going on at once. Sometimes she would play a game and not look at the people until from listening to them she had decided what they looked like. Then she would turn around and see if she were right.

"A chocolate egg cream, please."

"Certainly, Harriet. How are you?"

"OK." Harriet sat down, pleased that she was known. She put her twelve cents down and sipped away as she listened.

"My father is a rat."

"So, I have to admit, I handled that case in a perfect way, a really perfect way. I said to the judge …"

"He's a rat because he thinks he's perfect."

"Listen, Jane, we have to go to Orchard Street and get that material. I can't live in that house one more minute without shades. Anyone could see in."

Harriet had to restrain herself at this point from looking around at a new possibility for the spy route. If *anyone* could see in …

"You know, I've lost very few cases in my time, even if I do say so."

"He's such a rat he never lets my mother open her trap."

Rat trap, thought Harriet.

"You have no idea what it's like to hide all the time. Geez, I can't even walk around in a slip."

Her egg cream finished, Harriet summed up her guesses. The boy with the rat father would be skinny, have black hair, and a lot of pimples. The lawyer who won all his cases would be short, puffy-looking, and be leaning forward. She got no picture of the shadeless girl but decided that she must be fat. She turned around.

At first she couldn't tell. Then she saw the boy with black hair and pimples. She felt a surge of triumph. She looked at what must be the lawyer, one of two men. Then she listened to see if he were the one. No, the other one was the lawyer. He wasn't short and fat, he was long and thin, with a handsome face. She consoled herself with a faint puffiness he had around the eyes.

Well, no wonder she won't walk around in a slip, Harriet thought, looking at the girl with no shades, she's the fattest thing I ever saw.

Enough. Only two out of three. Some days were better than others. She slid off the stool and went on her way to Sport's house. Sport lived in an apartment that was up four flights of stairs. He opened the door wearing an apron and carrying a dishtowel. "Hi, Harriet, come in, I just got to do these dishes."

"Then whataya gonna do?"

"Then I sweep."

"Aw, Sport, you got too much work to do."

"Yeah, but what can I do? Somebody's got to do it. Once I didn't do it, and after a week I couldn't find the living room."

They went into the kitchen and Sport continued to do the dishes. Harriet pointed towards a closed door to the right of the kitchen. "Is *he* in there?"

"Yeah, he worked all night, so he's sleeping. I got to go to the store and then get back in time to fix his dinner."

"I couldn't even *fix* dinner, much less for my father. How do you do it?"

"Well, lots of times, you know, it's Eggsville."

"Doesn't he care what he eats?"

"Writers don't care what they eat. They just care what you think of them. Here, Harriet, hold this."

"I sure care what I eat." Just as she was saying this, Harriet heard a loud groan from the bedroom. She almost dropped the plate. "Hey, what's that?"

Sport looked totally unconcerned. “Nothing, just a bad dream. He has them all the time. Writers have a lot of bad dreams.”

“Don’t you want to be a writer, Sport? Gee, your father could even help you.”

Sport almost collapsed at the sink. “Are you kidding? You *know* I want to be a ball player. And if I’m not a *good* ball player, I’ll tell you something, I’m going to be a C.P.A.”

“What’s *that*?”

“You don’t know what a C.P.A. is?” Sport screeched.

“No,” said Harriet. She never minded admitting she didn’t know something. So what, she thought; I could always learn.

“Well, I’ll show you what that is. Come with me.” Sport put the dishtowel down, took Harriet by the hand, and led her into his room. You would have known it was Sport’s room because it was as neat as a pin. There was a little cot, made up army fashion, one straight chair, and a little desk. The desk was absolutely bare. Sport took a ring of keys out of his pocket and started unlocking the drawers to the desk. “You see these books? These are my books.” He stepped back proudly. Harriet looked. Each drawer was filled with large ledgers. One drawer held a cashbox, which was also locked.

“My, my,” she said, because she didn’t know what else to say.

“A C.P.A. is an accountant, for your information,” Sport said pompously, pulling back Harriet’s hand sharply because she had started to reach for one of the ledgers.

“What’s in all those?” asked Harriet, suspecting that they were empty.

“Our FINANCES. What do you think?” Sport was getting irritated.

“I hate money,” Harriet said.

“Well, you’d jolly well like it if you didn’t have any,” Sport said arrogantly. Harriet considered this. It was true. She’d never had to think about it.

“Well, gee, Sport, do you like to do that? Isn’t it just a lot of math?”

“Well, the math isn’t hard; that’s not it. I can’t explain. Don’t you know what I mean? Then you know where everything *is*.”

“Oh,” said Harriet, who did not understand at all.

“I mean, see, my father gets a cheque, and if I don’t take it, then the next day it’s gone and he just throws up his hands and goes in his room and shuts the door. Then we don’t eat.”

“Really?”

“Really. This way I take the cheque and I cash it and I plan what to do with all the money piece by piece and then we have enough to eat. See?”

“Yeah. That’s very sensible.”

“Well, I don’t know what would have happened to us if I hadn’t started doing that.”

“Yeah. Gee, I never knew this about you, Sport.”

Sport kind of kicked a foot around on the floor. Then they both felt embarrassed, so Sport went back into the kitchen, and Harriet, in the living room, seized this opportunity to try to see through the keyhole into Sport’s father’s room. She saw nothing but an old gym sock lying on the floor. Sport came into the living room and Harriet jumped back, then said quickly, “Well, I got to get back to my spy route. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“OK, I’ll see ya,” said Sport as he opened the door for her.

When the door closed behind her Harriet stood a minute thinking. Then she ran down the steps. When she got outside, she sat on the steps and wrote in her notebook:

SPORT’S HOUSE SMELLS LIKE OLD LAUNDRY, AND IT’S NOISY AND KIND OF POOR-LOOKING. MY HOUSE DOESN’T HAVE THAT SMELL AND IS QUIET LIKE MRS PLUMBER’S. DOES THAT MEAN WE ARE RICH? WHAT MAKES PEOPLE POOR OR RICH?

She walked along a little way, then was suddenly struck by another idea.

ARE RICH PEOPLE EVER GOING TO GROW UP TO BE WRITERS OR ARE WRITERS ALL LIKE MR ROCQUE WITH NO MONEY?

MY FATHER IS ALWAYS SAYING STARVINGARTIST OR STARVINGWRITER. MAYBE I BETTER REDUCE.

Harriet headed towards the Dei Santis' grocery, the first stop on her regular spy route. The grocery was on York Avenue, and there was a little alleyway beside it that provided three vantage points from which Harriet could watch. One was a window facing the alley, affording a view of the rear of the counter at which Papa Dei Santi stood. The other window on the alley showed the back of the store with the table around the back, in the courtyard, and showed the storeroom where Little Joe Curry worked all day.

She crept into the alley. Nothing was doing at the first window. She kept her body low and scooted to the second window. Suddenly she saw the whole family. She had to duck her head quickly in order not to be seen. Luckily the window was open a fraction, so she could hear what was being said.

Mama Dei Santi was speaking, "*Accidente!!* He take the truck, get killed!"

Harriet knew she must be talking about Fabio. Fabio was always wanting to take the truck somewhere. She peeked over the sill.

Fabio leaned against a packing case. A cigarette dangled from his mouth. He was tall, very thin, and had a gloomy look. He shifted slightly in irritation at his mother's remark.

His mother caught his mood and raised both hands high above her head. "What did I do to God to deserve to come to a country like this that should come down on my head to raise a son like you?"

"Oh, Mama." That was Maria Elena. She looked in the mirror all day and said dumb things. She was seventeen and very beautiful.

"Don't you Mama me. Look at Bruno, all day, all night, work in the store. *That's* a son." Mama Dei Santi spewed forth these words in a hiss.

Harriet peeked over the sill. Franca, who was fourteen and a complete blank of a person, leaned against the wall as though she had been propped there. Dino, who was six, travelled a toy car with his hand along one of the shelves. Papa Dei Santi turned slowly to Fabio. "*Mio figlio*," he began in a tired patient voice, "I work my life away for you. I come here with nothing. I get a pushcart. I sell vegetables. You know what makes a man that sells vegetables?"

Fabio frowned. The cigarette hardly moved in his mouth as he spoke. "You now *got* the store, Papa. You now got the truck. Can I borrow the truck?"

"No *good*. No *good*," Papa Dei Santi screamed with all his might.

There was a moment of strange silence as Fabio and his father stood staring at each other. Bruno walked heavily into the room. He was a thick, strong man with thick, strong thoughts in his head. He spoke slowly as though the thoughts had to come from a long way back in his head. "Let him take the car, Papa. Let him have a little fun. He's eighteen. He just wants a little fun."

"Fun, fun. Eighteen too old for fun. What fun you have, Bruno?"

"We're different, Papa. Let him go. You make him bad if you stop him."

"Bad? *Bad?* He's already bad. Flunk out the school. Hang around, lazy bum, all day. How I *make* him bad?"

"Oh, Papa," Maria Elena breathed softly as she leaned towards the mirror.

"Buzz, buzz, buzz," Dino whispered, having turned the car into an airplane.

The bell on the door of the shop rang, breaking into their anguish. Papa Dei Santi started towards the front. "Customer," he said under his breath, "no more talk. Everybody to work."

"Papa." It was only one word, but it took Fabio an enormous effort to get it out.

"No truck." Papa Dei Santi didn't even turn around. The words came out like bullets.

Fabio slumped, took a long drag on the cigarette without putting his hand to it. Maria Elena tried her hair a new way in the mirror. Mama Dei Santi walked heavily towards the front, following

Bruno. No one looked at Fabio. Harriet squatted under the window and wrote out everything she had seen. Then she wrote:

THAT FABIO MAY BE BAD BUT I DON'T BLAME HIM. I WOULDN'T WANT TO BE LIKE BRUNO EITHER. BRUNO LOOKS LIKE A BIG DUMB BEAR.

ONCE I THOUGHT I WANTED TO BE FRANCA AND LIVE IN THAT FAMILY. BUT SHE'S SO DULL IF I WAS HER I COULDN'T STAND MYSELF. I GUESS IT'S NOT MONEY THAT MAKES PEOPLE DULL. THERE IS A LOT I DON'T KNOW ABOUT THIS THING OF BEING DULL. I BETTER FIND OUT BECAUSE I MIGHT BE IT.

WHAT IS IT LIKE TO HAVE BROTHERS AND SISTERS? ONE THING, WHENEVER THEY YELLED IT WOULDN'T ALWAYS BE AT YOU, SOMETIMES IT WOULD BE AT YOUR BROTHER THEN YOU COULD LAUGH.

WHAT IS TOO OLD TO HAVE FUN? YOU CAN'T BE TOO OLD TO SPY EXCEPT IF YOU WERE FIFTY YOU MIGHT FALL OFF A FIRE ESCAPE, BUT YOU COULD SPY AROUND ON THE GROUND A LOT.

Harriet closed her book and crept around the back to see what Little Joe Curry was doing. Little Joe Curry was the delivery boy for the Dei Santis and he was always up to one thing. He was always eating. It was strange the Dei Santis made any money at all the way Little Joe ate.

Harriet peeked in. He was sitting there now, when he should have been working, eating a pound of cheese. Next to him, waiting to be consumed, sat two cucumbers, three tomatoes, a loaf of bread, a custard pie, three quarts of milk, a meatball sandwich about two feet long, two jars – one of pickles, one of mayonnaise – four apples and a large salami. Harriet's eyes widened and she wrote:

WHEN I LOOK AT HIM I COULD EAT A THOUSAND TOMATO SANDWICHES.

Harriet heard a little whispering noise in the alley. She knew who it was without even looking, because she was almost caught every day by the same people. Four skinny little kids appeared around the side of the house. They tiptoed up to the door and knocked discreetly. They were very poor children with torn dirty clothes and smudges all over their faces as though they were never washed. The oldest was around seven and the others were around four and five.

Little Joe opened the door. There wasn't a word exchanged as he handed them a tomato, a quart of milk, half of the cheese, the loaf of bread, half the salami, half the custard pie, and two apples. They distributed these things among themselves to make for easy carrying and scooted away down the alley as silently as they had come.

Little Joe went back to his eating. Harriet felt funny watching the scene. She sighed a little, then creeping along under the windows, went on to her next stop.

That night as Harriet lay in her bathtub taking her bath before dinner she felt very happy. She had done a good day's work. She listened to Ole Golly, who was going through Harriet's closet taking out things that needed cleaning. Ole Golly was whistling. It was a cheery though tuneless sort of whistling which Harriet rather liked. The yellow paint on the tiny bathroom walls looked clean and happy. Harriet felt warm and sleepy in the hot water.

Suddenly, the front door banged downstairs and Harriet could hear her father's voice.

"Finks, finks, double-barrelled rat, rat, rat, finks, finks, finks." He sounded very angry. Harriet could tell from his voice that he had stormed up the steps to the library. "You won't *believe* the iniquity … you will *not believe* when I tell you the unmitigated *finkiness* of those guys."

Then Mrs Welsch's voice, calm and comforting, obviously leading him to a chair. "What, darling? My heavens, what is it?"

"Well, mumble mumble, they're just the worst mumble mumble. I just *could not believe* …"

"Darling, here, have your drink."

Harriet was standing up in the bathtub, she was trying so hard to hear.

"What did you do today, Harriet?"

How annoying. Ole Golly had chosen *this* time to start a conversation. Harriet pretended not to hear as she kept listening.

"That mumble, he's an absolutely *inspired* fink, that's what he is, a real mumble I tell you, I never saw a mumble like him."

"Did you take a lot of notes?" Harriet tried to crane her ears past Ole Golly's question. Would she *just* shut up a minute?

"Darling, that's terrible, simply mumble."

"I don't know what I'm going to do. They're really going to mumble it up. If anything it'll be the worst show of the season. They're real mumbles, they are."

"What are you doing, Harriet M. Welsch, standing up in that bathtub?" Ole Golly looked exceedingly fierce. "Sit down there this minute and I'll wash your back. Look at those ears. Do you perhaps *pour* ink into them?"

"No, they itch a lot."

"That doesn't mean a thing, all that noise downstairs."

"Well, I'd like to hear it all the same."

"Your father has a very high-pressure job, that's all."

"What's a high-pressure job?"

"It means he's not allowed to do exactly what he wants with the job, and what he is allowed to do he isn't given enough time to do it in."

"Oh," said Harriet, thinking, What does *that* mean? "Do spies have high pressure?"

"Oh, yes, if they get caught."

"I'm never caught."

"Not yet."

"Ole Golly, are you ever going away?"

"When you get so big you don't need me, yes, but not right this minute. You're getting pretty old though," Ole Golly said, surveying Harriet critically.

There was a pause, then Harriet said, "Ole Golly, do you have a boyfriend?"

"Yes," said Ole Golly and looked away.

"*YES!*" Harriet almost fainted into her bath water.

"Yes," said Ole Golly with dignity. "Now time for bed."

There was a pause and then Harriet asked, "It's unsanitary to have a lot of cats in the house, isn't it?"

Ole Golly looked rather startled. "I always think of cats as rather clean, but then, a *lot* of cats … How many cats?"

"I think twenty-five, but I'm not sure. They move around a lot."

"*Twenty-five?* Here's your towel. Who do you know with twenty-five cats?"

"Oh, somebody." Harriet adored being mysterious.

"Who?"

"Oh, just somebody." And Harriet smiled to herself.

Ole Golly knew better than to pursue it. She always said that privacy was very important, especially to spies.

When Harriet was all through with her dinner and bundled off to bed she began to think of Harrison Withers and all his cats. Harrison Withers lived on Eighty-second at the top of a dilapidated rooming house. He had two rooms, one for him and one for the cats. In his room he had a bed, a chair, a work table at which he made birdcages, and a whole wall of birdcage-making tools. In the other room there was nothing but the cats. In the kitchen there was one glass, one cup, and twenty-six plates all stacked up.

It suddenly occurred to Harriet to wonder if he ate exactly the same food as the cats, or different food. She must find out tomorrow. She could find out by following him around the supermarket.

She fell asleep contentedly. Right before she fell asleep she wondered who in the world Ole Golly's boyfriend was.

Chapter Four

THE NEXT AFTERNOON, after her cake and milk, Harriet went straight to Mrs Plumber's house. She knew it was dangerous, but once her curiosity was aroused she had never been able to give up a spot on her route. As she got to the house she saw Little Joe Curry in conversation with the maid. She sidled around the front, took a ball from her pocket that she always carried for such moments, and began to engage in an innocent-looking game of ball right in front of them.

Little Joe was leaning against the door. He always looked tired when he wasn't eating. The maid sounded very aggravated. "Haven't got the change. She went off left me without a cent."

"Well, when will she be back? I could come back."

"Lord knows. When she go to Elizabeth Arden she sometimes gone all day. Lot of work to do on her, you know." The maid giggled nastily.

"Man, she got all that jack and don't pay. They all alike – more they got, less they pay." And with that pronouncement Little Joe shuffled off back for his afternoon snack.

Harriet looked unconcerned as he went past. The maid went inside. Harriet leaned against the hydrant and wrote:

I WONDER WHAT THEY DO TO HER ALL DAY. I ONCE SAW MY MOTHER IN A MUD PACK. THEY'LL NEVER GET ME IN A MUD PACK.

She slammed her book and went to the Dei Santis'. The store was terribly busy. Everyone was running to and fro, even Franca who usually had to be propped up somewhere. Little Joe wasn't even back yet. Well, thought Harriet, this looks like a rotten spy day. She checked Mrs Plumber and the Dei Santis off her list and went on to the Robinsons, the next people on the route.

The Robinsons were a couple who lived in a duplex on Eighty-eighth Street. When they were alone they never said a word to each other. Harriet liked to watch them when they had company, because it made her laugh to see them showing off their house. Because the Robinsons had only one problem. They thought they were perfect.

Luckily their living room was on the ground floor of their duplex. Harriet scurried through the back passageway to the garden and there, by leaning around a box kept for garden tools, she could see in without being seen.

The Robinsons were sitting, as they always were, staring into space. They never worked, and what was worse, they never even read anything. They bought things and brought them home and then they had people in to look at them. Otherwise they didn't seem to do a blessed thing.

The doorbell rang.

"Ah," said Mrs Robinson. "There they are now."

She got up sedately and walked slowly, even though she had obviously been sitting there waiting for the ring. She looked critically as Mr Robinson adjusted his smoking jacket, then went to the door.

"Come in, Jack, Martha, how lovely to see you. It's been so long. How long will you be in town?"

"Well, we—"

"Look, before you go a step further, look, Martha, at these lovely vinyl squares I just got put in. Aren't they just perfect?"

"Yes, they are—"

"And that chest in the corner, isn't that a find?"

"Well, it's just …"

Mr Robinson stood up. "Hello there, Jack."

"Hi there, fella. Long time no—"

"Hey, Jack, I wanta show you my gun collection. You haven't been here since I got two new ones. Just come in here and …" They disappeared from Harriet's view.

"Martha, come here. You must see the … oh, here, put your coat and purse down in this perfect place, this eighteenth-century luggage rack. Isn't it divine?"

"Why, yes, it's—"

"Look, come here, right over here, now *isn't* that the most beautiful garden you've ever seen?"

"Yes, oooh, aaah, it's just—"

"You know, Martha, we have the most perfect life …"

"You don't have any children, do you, Grace?"

"Why, no, but frankly we think that's just perfect …"

Harriet, having ducked when they looked at the garden, fell over laughing. When she recovered herself she grabbed her notebook.

BOY, OLE GOLLY TOLD ME ONCE THAT SOME PEOPLE THINK THEY'RE PERFECT BUT SHE OUGHTA SEE THESE TWO. IF THEY HAD A BABY IT WOULD LAUGH IN ITS HEAD ALL THE TIME AT THEM SO IT'S A GOOD THING THEY DON'T. ALSO IT MIGHT NOT BE PERFECT. THEN THEY MIGHT KILL IT. I'M GLAD I'M NOT PERFECT – I'D BE BORED TO DEATH. BESIDES IF THEY'RE SO GREAT WHY DO THEY JUST SIT THERE ALL DAY STARING AT NOTHING? THEY COULD BE CRAZY AND NOT EVEN KNOW IT.

She headed over to Harrison Withers' house. She liked to look at the birdcages he made but, more than that, she intended to be there when he got caught. The Health Department was forever trying to get in to catch him because he had too many cats, but Harrison Withers was very crafty. Whenever his doorbell rang he looked out the window, and if the man ringing the bell wore a hat, he never let him in. All the men in the Health Department wore hats and Harrison Withers didn't know anybody who wore a hat.

Harriet climbed the steps to the top floor of his rooming house and the last flight that led up to the roof. She could look through one skylight at a place where the paint had been worn away, and she was sure she couldn't be seen from inside.

She peered down. As she did, she remembered that she had planned to watch him in the supermarket to see if he lived on kidneys like the cats.

The cats were all milling around. She went to the other skylight. Sunlight flooded the other room but here caught glints from tools, from the tiny shining minarets which topped the cages. Harriet liked to look at this room. The cages were beautiful soaring things, and when he was in this room, Harrison Withers was a happy man.

Harriet liked to watch him work, admired the patience which allowed him to sit bent over for hours twisting minuscule wires around ridiculously small connections.

Oh, what luck! Harrison Withers was just coming through the door with a big shopping bag. Now she could see what he ate. The cats all followed him into the kitchen as he started taking things out of the bag. They started mewing and rubbing against his legs as he took kidney after kidney out of the bag.

"There now, children," he spoke to them gently. He always spoke very softly. "There now. We're all going to eat now. Hello, everybody – yes, yes, hello. Hello, David, hello, Rasputin, yes, Goethe, Alex, Sandra, Thomas Wolfe, Pat, Puck, Faulkner, Cassandra, Gloria, Circe, Koufax, Marijane, Willy Mays, Francis, Kokoschka, Donna, Fred, Swann, Mickey Mantle, Sebastian, Yvonne, Jerusalem, Dostoyevsky and Barnaby. Hello, hello, hello."

Harriet had counted this time. There were twenty-six. Then that meant that the twenty-six plates were for the cats. What did he eat from? She watched as he pulled from the very bottom of the bag one small container of yogurt. Cats don't eat yogurt, thought Harriet; that must be what he eats.

She watched while he fed the cats then spooned a bit of yogurt into his mouth. He went into his workroom, carrying the container, and closed the door behind him because the cats were not allowed in that room. He sat at his work table before a particularly beautiful cage, a replica of a Victorian summer house.

Quiet descended upon the room as he sat studying the cage. His hand moved as in a dream to put the yogurt to one side. He looked lovingly, his eyes slightly glazed, at the one small unfinished portion of the structure. Very slowly he moved one piece a quarter of an inch to the left. He sat back and looked at it a long time. Then he moved it back.

Harriet wrote in her notebook:

HE LOVES TO DO THAT. IS THIS WHAT OLE GOLLY MEANS? SHE SAYS PEOPLE WHO LOVE THEIR WORK LOVE LIFE. DO SOME PEOPLE HATE LIFE? ANYWAY I WOULDN'T MIND LIVING LIKE HARRISON WITHERS BECAUSE HE LOOKS HAPPY EXCEPT I WOULDN'T LIKE ALL THOSE CATS. I MIGHT EVEN LIKE A DOG.

She took one last look at Harrison Withers, who was gently winding a piece of wire around two little curling pieces of wood. She got up then and went down to the street. In front of the house she stopped to write:

THERE IS ALSO THAT YOGURT. THINK OF EATING THAT ALL THE TIME. THERE IS NOTHING LIKE A GOOD TOMATO SANDWICH NOW AND THEN.

She decided to go see Janie awhile before going on to the rest of her route. Janie lived in the garden duplex of a renovated brownstone off East End Avenue on Eighty-fourth Street. Harriet rang

the outside bell and pushed the door when it buzzed back. Janie was standing inside at her doorway and she was in a foul mood. Harriet could tell just by looking at her. Janie always looked terribly cheerful when she was in her most angry mood. Harriet figured it had to be that way because Janie's normal face was one of sheer rage. Today she smiled happily and sang out winningly, "Hello, there, Harriet Welsch." Things couldn't be worse.

Harriet walked towards her tentatively, as one would towards a mad dog, trying to see Janie's eyes more clearly, but Janie whipped inside the door. Harriet followed her in.

"What's the matter?" Harriet whispered. They were standing in the little foyer off the living room.

"They're after me," whispered Janie, still smiling wildly.

"Who?"

"The Rat Pack." This was what Janie called her mother, her father, her brother and her grandmother who lived with them.

"Why?"

"My mother says I'm going to blow us all up and that I have to go to dancing school. Come past here, then they won't see us." Janie was hissing through her outrageous smile as she led them up the back steps to what she called her lab but which was really her room.

One corner of her room had been stripped bare. The rug had been pulled back, exposing one corner where Janie had started to cut off the excess to get it out of the way, but which she had been stopped from doing by her mother in an hysterical fit. At that time there had been a large fight through which Janie grinned broadly, and her mother let her know that it didn't make a whit of difference if they didn't ordinarily have rugs in labs ("They catch fire," Janie had said, which had set her mother off again), that Janie had a rug in her room that was going to stay there, and that the very best she could hope for was to have it rolled back. So it lay there in a roll at the end of the room.

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