



Two *for* Joy

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illustrated by
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*To the unbreakable Audrey Ellis Gregg
and her great-granddaughter, Judith Ellen*

One

There I was, a starting forward in the biggest, most important soccer game of my Olympic career. With only a minute left, the game was tied. When my teammate made an awesome pass to me, the crowd began chanting my name: “Jenna! Jenna! Jenna!” I knew what I had to do. I looked up at the crowd and waved. I turned left, but there was nowhere to go. The other team had closed in all around me. They towered over me, but I was not afraid, not one bit. I pivoted right and barely squeaked through an opening that was just my size. I heard Mom in the

stands screaming her lungs out: “Good job, Jenna! Good job!” All the way down the field, I zigged and zagged and ducked and turned until there was nothing and no one left between me and the biggest, grizzliest goalie I had ever seen. I looked her right in the eyes and growled, “Look out—this one might hurt.” I took a deep breath and kicked with all my might. The ball spun in midair. Then I heard a telephone ring and ring. The ringing grew louder and louder. Coach yelled, “Turn that phone off! Let’s get back to the game!” But the phone kept right on butting into the game.

I opened my eyes and looked around. There were no stadium lights, no roaring Olympic crowd, and no silky red-white-and-blue uniforms. I was wearing my green pj’s with purple monkeys, but not my shin guards. My feet were bare. There were my cleats, right on the closet floor. Outside the window, the sky was

still black and the stars were still bright. But the phone *was* ringing.

Who would call in the middle of the night?

A light crept under my door. Without making a peep, I tiptoed over the squeaky board in the hall and into Mom's room.

Mom was quiet on the phone and listening closely. I sat on the bed beside her and slipped my hand in hers. She squeezed my fingers and rubbed my hair, but didn't say a word. The house was so hushed, I could hear the refrigerator humming in the kitchen. I could hear a car passing down our street.

But I barely heard Mom say, "Thank you for calling." Then she hung up and turned around slowly.

"What's happened, Mama? What's wrong?"

Mom looked right into my face. "Here's the truth, my big girl. That was the hospital in



Pleasant Grove. Earlier tonight, Tannie fell. This time I'm really worried."

Tannie's our name for my great-aunt Britannia; she's just like me. There is nothing on earth that Tannie can't do. She drives a pickup truck as big as a barn. She goes to the races all by herself. One time she sang karaoke with Mom and me. She knows how to fly an airplane, and she has her very own motorcycle. She even played soccer a long time ago, way before it was cool.

Have you ever seen an old lady, like Tannie, head a soccer ball?

"What happened this time?" I asked Mom. "Did Tannie throw the lawn mower in the truck again?" The last time she did that, she had taken a nasty spill."

Mom shook her head.

"Did she slip off a tall ladder while painting

her house? Or fall from the tractor after making the hay?”

Mom giggled a little, the way she does when she’s nervous. She shook her head and sighed.

“No, no. This time it was none of those things,” Mom tried to explain. “Tannie, as usual, was moving too fast. She missed a step off the back porch and has broken her ankle.”

“Oh, that’s it? She just fell off the porch?” was all I could think to say. Then finally I asked, “Will Tannie be okay?”

Mom looked worried, and she looked extra tired.

She answered, “Tannie is strong, but her bones have grown more fragile over the years. Her ankle will heal in time. She doesn’t need surgery—that’s the good news.”

“Then, why are you so worried? My teacher broke her ankle and came right back to school, on crutches.”

“It’s not really Tannie’s ankle that worries me; the fracture was stable.”

My mom’s a nurse, and sometimes she talks to me like I work at the hospital, too. I nodded and rubbed my chin as if I were the doctor. “Hmm, the fracture was stable,” I repeated.

“Right. But this is the fourth time in half as many years that Tannie’s fallen and hurt herself. I’m afraid it’s only going to get worse,” Mom said. “Next time it could be her hip or her back.”

Then Mom added, “Tannie’s doctor thinks the farm is too much for her now. It would be safer for her to live someplace smaller; she needs to be near people, not way out in the country where no one is around to help. She’s not going to like it, but Tannie needs to move.”

I thought of Tannie’s yard, full of pink tea roses and big, showy flowers like gladiolus and hollyhock. I pictured her vegetable garden, which spreads across an entire acre of land, so

big it could be a soccer field. I remembered the bobwhite quail that I always flush out of the woods at Tannie's place. Tannie loves all kinds of birds, just like I do.

I've seen lots of birds in my life, but Tannie's seen lots more. Tannie keeps a list of all the different birds she's ever seen. She has hiked through mountains in Cuba to try to find a special woodpecker. She even flew to Peru to see the birds of Machu Picchu.

Almost 10,000 different bird species live on the earth! And my aunt Tannie has seen 3,026 of them. Now that I'm eight, I might just start a life list like Tannie's.

Then I remembered the chickens and the mean old rooster that run all around Tannie's farm.

"Where will the chickens go?" I asked. "What will she do?"

Two

Where else is there for Tannie to live?" I asked Mom.

"Don't worry about that now." Mom walked me back to my room. "Hop back in your bed, little one; find a good dream until morning." She pulled my Sunbonnet Sue quilt all the way up to my neck.

"Who made this quilt? Jenna Phoebe, do you remember?" Mom asked. She always uses both my names when she kisses me and tucks me in.

I snuggled in deeper. Yes, I remembered. “Tannie made it when she was my age. That was a long time ago, when she was a farm girl, with much stronger bones.”

“This quilt has been keeping little girls warm for a lot of years,” Mom reminded me. “First Tannie, then me, and now you.” Mom kissed my nose good night.

“Try to get some sleep; it will be morning soon.” The clock by my bed had flipped over to four o’clock; I flipped over to the left.

A mockingbird started singing like crazy right outside my window. I couldn’t help but think of Tannie and her farm in Mississippi; there are lots of mockingbirds at Tannie’s.

I fluffed up my pillow. I flopped to the right. I wished I could see Tannie soon.

I turned onto my back and then onto my tummy. No matter whether I curled up tight or

straightened myself out, I could not get to sleep. That crazy bird would not stop singing.

I could only think of Tannie, my very most favorite aunt.

We're all the family Tannie has left in the world since her husband, Louis, died. My great-uncle Louis was really my great-uncle by marriage. I've heard stories about him; he's famous in my family. Everyone called him "Saint Louis" because he was such a good man and the only one with patience enough to handle Tannie's strong will. I never did get to meet Saint Louis; he died before I was born.

Now, other than the chickens, Tannie lives alone with her cat, Butt.

When we visit, Tannie's rooster acts like he is the boss of me. I have to be careful around him. Once, I tried to pet him, and he bit my finger. It

didn't bleed, but it made me cry. The chickens are way nicer than that mean old rooster.

Tannie can make a chicken sound even better than a chicken: "*Bock-bock-bock-be-Gock! Bock-bock-bock-be-Gock!*"

Tannie loves those chickens like they are her babies. Maybe that's because she never had any babies of her own. I yawned. Actually, Butt is the biggest baby of all.

I yawned again and thought of how sweet Butt is to the chickens. Butt is so sweet, he even shows the rooster his tummy, and he never, ever lifts a paw to hurt the hens. Tannie says Butt is a pacifist—that means he loves peace.

Butt is the cutest cat I've ever seen. He's orange and white, with the sweetest pink nose and dainty little feet for a tomcat. He prances around Tannie's house, swishing his tail, always with his bottom high in the air—that's how he got his name.



He's also the smartest cat I've ever met. When Butt is thirsty for cool water, he takes Tannie's finger in his mouth and pulls her to the sink. If Butt is hungry for a snack, he paws at the pantry. When it's too hot outside for yard work, Butt makes Tannie go inside. Ever since Saint Louis died, Butt has been Tannie's best friend.

I kicked the quilt away and dangled one foot off the bed. I wished I could blink twice and be at Tannie's farm.

I tried counting sheep, but the sheep turned into clucking chickens . . . and then a crowing rooster.

I closed my eyes to find my Olympic dream again. Instead, I dreamed of Tannie's fruit orchard, with strawberries in the spring, blueberries in the summer, and apples in the fall. I dreamed of how Tannie's chickens always

let me reach under their soft, warm feathers to
take enough fresh eggs for breakfast.

Where else could there be, besides the farm,
for Tannie and Butt?

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