



Ivy willed her legs to be like pistons. She pedaled her way up Canyon Road, sweating and pushing her muscles to overcome the steep upward grade. In her fifth-grade science book, gleaming steel pistons were pictured under the heading “How an Engine Works,” but the pistons in the textbook engine felt no pain. Ivy’s legs and lungs burned with the effort of the uphill ride. Later, she thought, *If I’d been going along at twenty miles an hour, I never would have seen the turtle, and who knows how things would have worked out?*

It lay on its back, still alive but having been hit by a car, covered with blood and road dirt. It was a big desert tortoise. Ivy righted it gently and examined the wound. “Nasty!” said Ivy. “But fixable. I’m going to have to take you up to Annie’s house and hose you off,” said Ivy. “Give you some water and let you rest. And maybe you’d like a raw egg to eat.”

Annie wouldn’t mind her bringing the turtle. Annie understood Ivy better than anyone in the world, and had since they had both been five. And Annie’s mother wouldn’t mind the filthy turtle nearly so much as Ivy’s own mother would.

Cheerfully, then, Ivy wedged the bleeding turtle into her bicycle basket and pumped the heavily laden bike up the next ten switchbacks to Canyon Ridge. Straddling Canyon Ridge, the mansions of the old silver-mining families looked out over western Nevada, valley on one side, the Washoe mountains on the other.

That Saturday afternoon's visit to Annie was to be a good-bye visit. Annie was headed, the next day, two thousand miles away to summer camp in New Hampshire. For the last two summers, Annie went east in June, a few days after school was over, and stayed until just before Labor Day, when school began again. Annie's mother and grandmother had all gone to Camp Allegro on Silver Lake when they were girls.

Allegro had its own mystique. Even though Annie had taught Ivy to sing every one of the Camp Allegro songs, the white-and-green-outfitted girls remained a puzzlement to Ivy. Annie did not explain the mystery because none of it was part of Ivy's world or ever would be.

Ivy pulled into Annie's driveway, crunching the gravel as she did. Annie's mother stood with a hose, watering the delicate Russian sage and the small balloons of scarlet mallow that filled her garden. She raised a hand in greeting and

smiled. “What have you got there, Ivy?” she called across the garden.

“A turtle, Mrs. Evans,” Ivy answered, lifting the injured creature, whose head and legs had retreated inside its shell, “He’s hurt. Can I use the hose to clean him off, please?”

“Of course,” said Annie’s mother. “Bring him over. Put him down right here. Poor thing. Hit by a car?”

“Yep, I think so, probably,” said Ivy. She ran the cold water over the dirty shell and gently into the wound, clearing it of gravel and sand. “What I could use,” said Ivy, now kneeling in the soft grass by the side of her patient, “is some duct tape.”

“Duct tape?” asked Annie’s mother.

“Duct tape will hold anything together pretty permanently and protect the wound. I figure if he lives and the shell grows back, the duct tape’ll

just be shed off. I hope maybe if I put him in the woodshed and give him an egg, he might eat it.”

“Egg?” asked Annie’s mother.

“Raw egg. It’s in *The Home Vet*,” explained Annie. Ivy had studied up about what lots of creatures ate in the one book her father owned, *The Home Veterinarian*. Not that Ivy’s dad was an actual vet. He was stableman at the Red Star Ranch and he just looked up horse ailments.

“Good idea!” said Annie’s mother. Ivy adored Annie’s mother. She didn’t like to think she loved her more than her own mom, but Ivy’s mother worked so hard and got so bone tired every night after all the dishes were put away and the ranch kitchen cleaned for breakfast, she had no time to be easy-breezy like Annie’s mother. Annie’s mother got to water her flower garden and do good deeds all day if she wanted.

“Leave the turtle inside the petunia bed,

honey. He can't get out. Come in the kitchen way," said Annie's mother. "We'll get an egg and maybe some celery for that poor creature. Let me get you a new shirt. That one's covered in turtle blood. Annie has a friend from camp here for the night."

"Friend?" asked Ivy. Ivy had never met anyone else in the world who went to Camp Allegro. Ivy didn't want that friend, whoever she was, to be there and interrupt her and Annie's last afternoon together before the Annie-empty eleven-week summer set in. The friend made Camp Allegro more real than Ivy wanted it to be. They entered the kitchen. Annie's mother rested a bunch of her garden flowers on the counter.

"A California girl," said Annie's mother, removing an egg from the fridge and rustling in a drawer for the tape. "Annie!" she called out toward the porch. "Did you take that roll of silver tape we had in here?"

A muffled “*What?*” came from the porch five rooms away.

“I said, did you take that big roll of silvery tape out of the kitchen drawer for some reason?” her mother repeated loudly.

This question was not answered. Annie in person came into the kitchen with two empty glasses in her hand. “What, Mom?” she said.

“Not *What, Mom*. Say, *I can’t hear you, Mom*,” corrected her mother. “Where’s that silver tape in the big fat roll, honey?”

Annie was followed by another girl, with slightly slanted tawny eyes and bobbed hair, sleek as a mink.

“Hey! Ive!” said Annie, “Meet my tent mate for the summer. She stopped off in Reno and spent the night! We’re flying out in the morning together.”

Ivy forgot the tent mate’s name the moment it was said. Was it Emily? Or Milly? Or Molly?

She was concentrating on the amber-colored eyes and the slight smile that tent-mate-to-be had offered and then suddenly withdrawn as she recoiled in horror at Ivy. “What happened to your . . . your shirt?” she said. “Did you have an accident or something?”

Ivy looked down. Smears of turtle blood and gravel had wrecked the front of her blouse. Not that it was a very good blouse to begin with.

“It’s . . . I’m fine,” Ivy struggled to explain. “It’s just—I found an injured desert tortoise by the side of the road and I was trying to save him, and I guess . . . I guess he bled all over me!”

Annie and the tent mate had put on the short-sleeved polo shirts that the camp required its girls to wear. The shirts were blinding white with the green Allegro crest on the breast pocket, and the shorts were green with a white *A* monogrammed on the hem.

Annie took Ivy by the hand and led her to

the porch, although Ivy knew the way perfectly. In the hall Ivy nearly tripped over the two identical green duffel bags. They were labeled CAMP ALLEGRO, CRAWFORD NOTCH, NEW HAMPSHIRE, and strapped up with canvas web belts, ready for their trip east.

Ivy fixed her eyes again on the words under the Allegro crest on the two identical white shirts, still with their folds from the camp store's supply packs: FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY CAMP ALLEGRO 1909–1949. The tent mate's eyes raced down Ivy's clothing twice. The eyes were now a little amused. Ivy felt like a snail.

Annie's mother served lemonade to the three girls out on the porch. Down in the valley, Ivy's family's whole house—a trailer—could have fit into Annie's screened-in porch twice over. Annie's house looked out over the Washoe mountains, and on a clear day you might see Lake Tahoe from the attic.

“I know you are already fabulous pals!” Annie’s mother chirped. Did she know the chance of them all being pals was as likely as a snowball surviving on a griddle? Ivy wondered.

The tent mate nattered on about last summer’s scandal. An Allegro tennis counselor had been caught in the woods with a canoe instructor from the boys’ camp across the lake. What the two might have been doing among the New Hampshire pines had been on everyone’s lips.

“The two of them were probably just holding hands and singing songs in the woods!” said Annie’s mother, amused. But her smile said she knew better and that only got the tent mate started up again about how the boy counselor had been fired and the girl counselor shamed to tears by the Allegro camp director.

Ivy listened impatiently. She couldn’t wait to tell them about the rattlesnake that had wound itself around the axle of her dad’s pickup truck

the night before. That was much more exciting than last year's camp gossip.

The tent mate brought out a bottle of nail polish. There was no room edgewise for Ivy to say a word. She couldn't talk around or over this Allegro girl, with her bright hair and camp talk. Annie seemed already transported to New Hampshire. The tent mate kicked off her shoes.

"They don't let you do your nails at Camp Allegro," she explained in Ivy's direction. "Allegro was founded by missionaries, and missionaries don't believe in nail polish."

Ivy curled her hands so that the tent mate would not see the rough condition of her fingernails, but the tent mate wasn't the least bit interested in Ivy's fingernails. Annie spread both hands on the flagstone floor, and the tent mate coated each nail with glowing polish. "You can't have nail polish or radios or movie magazines or hair curlers at camp," said Annie for Ivy's benefit.

“Even if your mom sends candy bars, you are honor bound to turn ’em in.”

“But guess what!” confided the tent mate. “They can’t take the polish off your nails if you put it on before you get there!”

“Remember the night last year,” said Annie, “when we sneaked into Tent Seven and painted Frances McCall’s toenails blue while she was asleep, and she didn’t even wake up?”

Ivy sipped her lemonade and watched the nail polish appear on Annie’s fingertips in two lovingly applied coats.

Annie turned to Ivy and finally asked, “So, Ivy, besides injured turtles, what are you up to?”

Ivy took a deep breath. Her turn. The tent mate concentrated on the nail polish, fanning Annie’s fingertips dry. “Dad ran over a rattlesnake with his pickup!” she said. “A ten footer! It got coiled around his front axle. He had to get out and shoot its head off with a twenty-two!

“He drove home, and guess what Billy Joe Butterworth did! He crawled under Dad’s truck, uncoiled the headless rattlesnake, skinned it, and set the skin to dry up on the barn roof. But by morning vultures took away what was left of the snake. Billy Joe just stood outside staring up there at the empty barn roof and saying words he was not allowed to say. Only thing the vultures left was the rattle. Billy said he could sell it.”

The tent mate turned white as a dinner plate. “Rattlesnakes!” she said. “We don’t have those in San Francisco!”

“Lucky my dad saw it,” said Ivy. “It could have come off the axle and bit his leg. Dad would have been dead in thirty minutes. He was an hour up Mule Canyon, pickin’ up a dead buck for the mountain patrol. Nobody around.”

The tent mate was horrified. “I don’t want to hear any more about rattlesnakes or guns or

dead bucks!” she said. “Now I’m going to have nightmares about poisonous snakes getting into my bed!”

“There’s no rattlers up here near the house,” said Annie. “We’re too high. Above the snake line. It’s kind of like the tree line.”

“There’s no such thing as a snake line,” Ivy said. “There’s rattlers and sidewinders, even scorpions, all over the—” Annie shot Ivy a dark, warning look that said *Stop now!* She tried to steer the subject back to a bus trip up Mount Washington and how many choruses of “Ninety-nine Bottles of Beer on the Wall” had been sung on the bus.

But it was too late. The tent mate’s hands shot up to her face. “Scorpions are poisonous!” she gasped. “They crawl out of the shower drains and bite you before you even know they’re there! You can die!”

“The Nevada ones aren’t so bad,” said Ivy.

She looked at Annie's face. That remark had not redeemed her for the rattler story. She decided not to tell the tent mate that Billy Joe Butterworth liked to capture scorpions and make them fight in mason jars while he watched. Annie knew about Billy Joe's scorpion matches, of course. But Annie didn't want any more snake or scorpion talk. That was clear from her expression.

Ivy picked up the three lemonade glasses and carried them down the hall and into the kitchen. Annie's mother was carefully arranging fruit in a silver bowl. In went a pear, and then the pear was removed in favor of a peach. She looked up and saw Ivy's face.

"Honey," she said, "I'll miss seeing you around here this summer. You, too, I'll bet."

Ivy tried and failed to smile sunnily at Annie's mom. "I'll miss you a whole lot, too," she said. It was about all she could say. This kitchen was as much home to her as her own. Annie's mother

as much mother to her as her own mom. It had been that way as long as she could remember.

“How’s your mom?” asked Annie’s mother, as she always did.

“Workin’ hard,” said Ivy.

“And your dad?”

“Him, too. Lots of guests coming this summer.”

“How’s that Butterworth boy? Making trouble?”

No answer from Ivy. She washed out the glasses vigorously at the kitchen sink and stood them on the drain board.

Annie’s mother put down a nectarine and settled a hand on Ivy’s shoulder. “Summer camp friends are like summer breezes,” she whispered. “Come the end of August, Annie will say good-bye to all her camp friends and settle back into her regular life. Now, Ivy, you’ll stay and have supper, won’t you? We have lamb chops! Your favorite.”

Ivy shook her head. “We’ve got three guests at the ranch this week,” she answered. “Gotta help out. But thank you all the same.”

Ivy strolled back down the hall with a plate of cookies. Annie’s mother had covered the flagstones on the porch floor with a scarlet-and-brown rug. Two more of these rugs hung in frames on the wall. They were museum pieces, according to Annie’s mother, two hundred years old and too delicate to be walked on. In the corner Annie and the tent mate had settled into a game of Old Maid, pairing up farmers and milkmaids. Somewhere in the deck was that fatal mateless card, the old lady with the crazy hair, forever alone in the world.

The tent mate’s shoes still lay where they had been kicked, near the radiator. The deeply shined uppers were hand-stitched to the welt, the leather glove soft. Ivy could see inside the words *Ferragamo—Italy* in gold script. They

were tempting as chocolates. Without thinking, Ivy slipped off her sneakers and put the soft brown shoes on. They fit her as if they had been made for her. She marveled at their comfort. How much would it take to buy shoes of this kind? Probably a whole month of her dad's pay.

Annie's voice came a little sharply. "Ivy! What are you doing in those shoes?"

"Oh, sorry," said Ivy. She blushed horribly. "They were so beautiful. I only . . ."

Annie glared. *Please don't embarrass me even more after that half-dead turtle and rattlesnake business*, was what her eyes said.

The tent mate shrugged and went back to sorting her cards. "You want 'em? You can have 'em. They're my sister's, anyway."

Ivy so wanted the Italian shoes. She wanted to keep them on her feet forever. She wanted to hear the musical squeak of the heels. She wanted to own something that was not scrimped for,

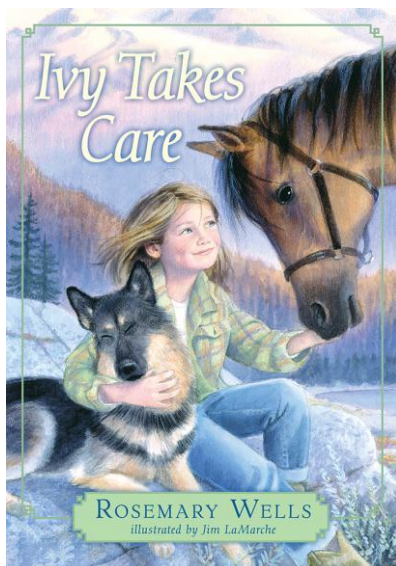
dollar by dollar, and bought at the end-of-season sale in the Sears Roebuck catalog. She kicked the shoes off quickly, as if they burned, gathered up her sneakers, and ran out of the room without saying good-bye. She dashed out to her bicycle, which was leaning against the house.

“Good-bye!” hung in the porch air for a moment. It was the tent mate’s voice. Then Annie came out.

“Ivy, I’m sorry,” Annie said. “But, jeez Louise, you make us look like hicks out here with your rattlesnakes and scorpions. Emily Hopkins is from San Francisco. Her family owns the Mark Hopkins Hotel. Of course she has Italian shoes! Do you have to act like you’ve never laid eyes on anything but Keds before? Do you have to mention all that snake stuff? Emily Hopkins is going to think we live in Outer Mongolia, and she’s going to tell everybody at Camp Allegro that we’re a bunch of hillbillies!”

Ivy Takes Care

Rosemary Wells



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