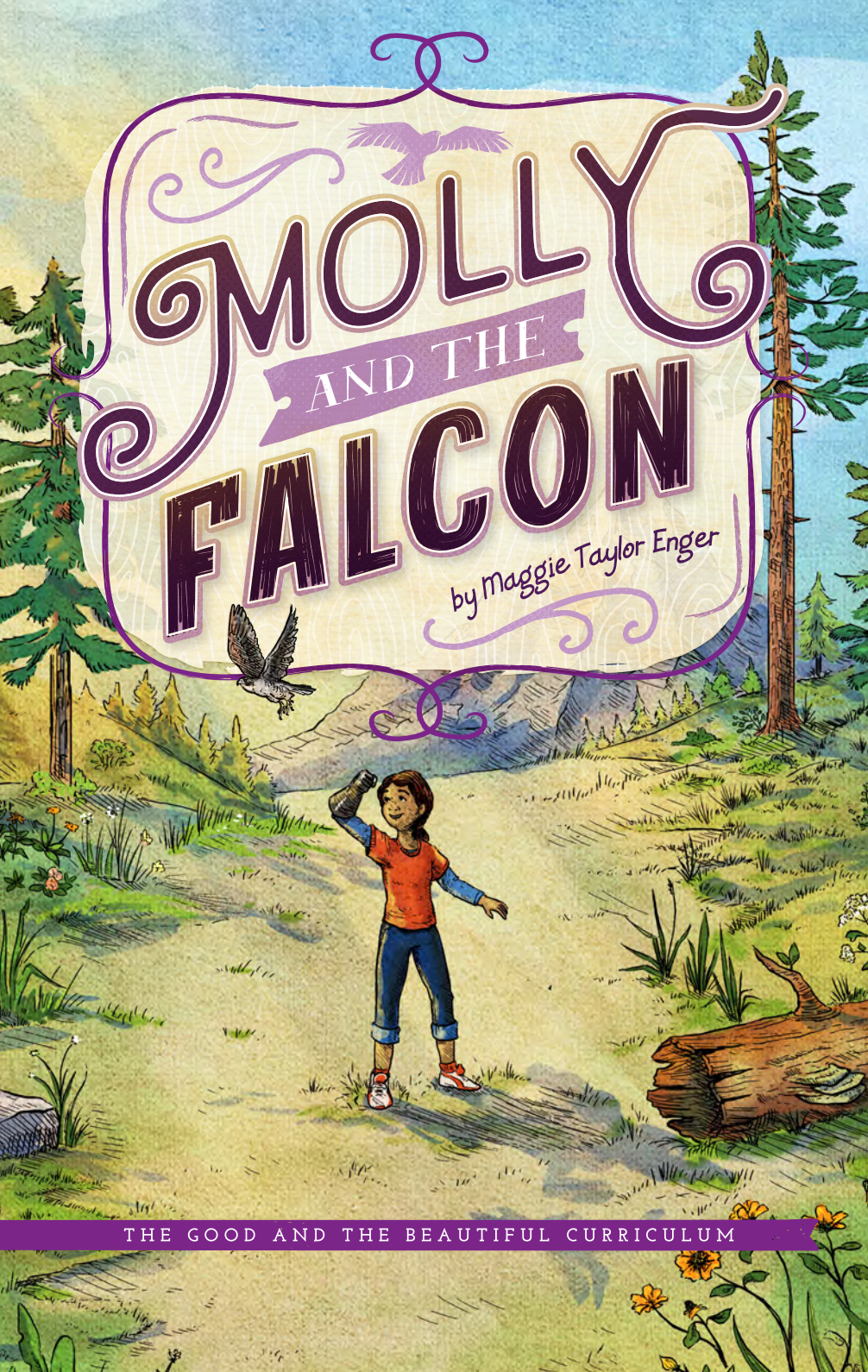

MOLLY
AND THE
FALCON
by Maggie Taylor Enger
THE GOOD AND THE BEAUTIFUL CURRICULUM

MOLLY AND THE FALCON

by Maggie Taylor Enger

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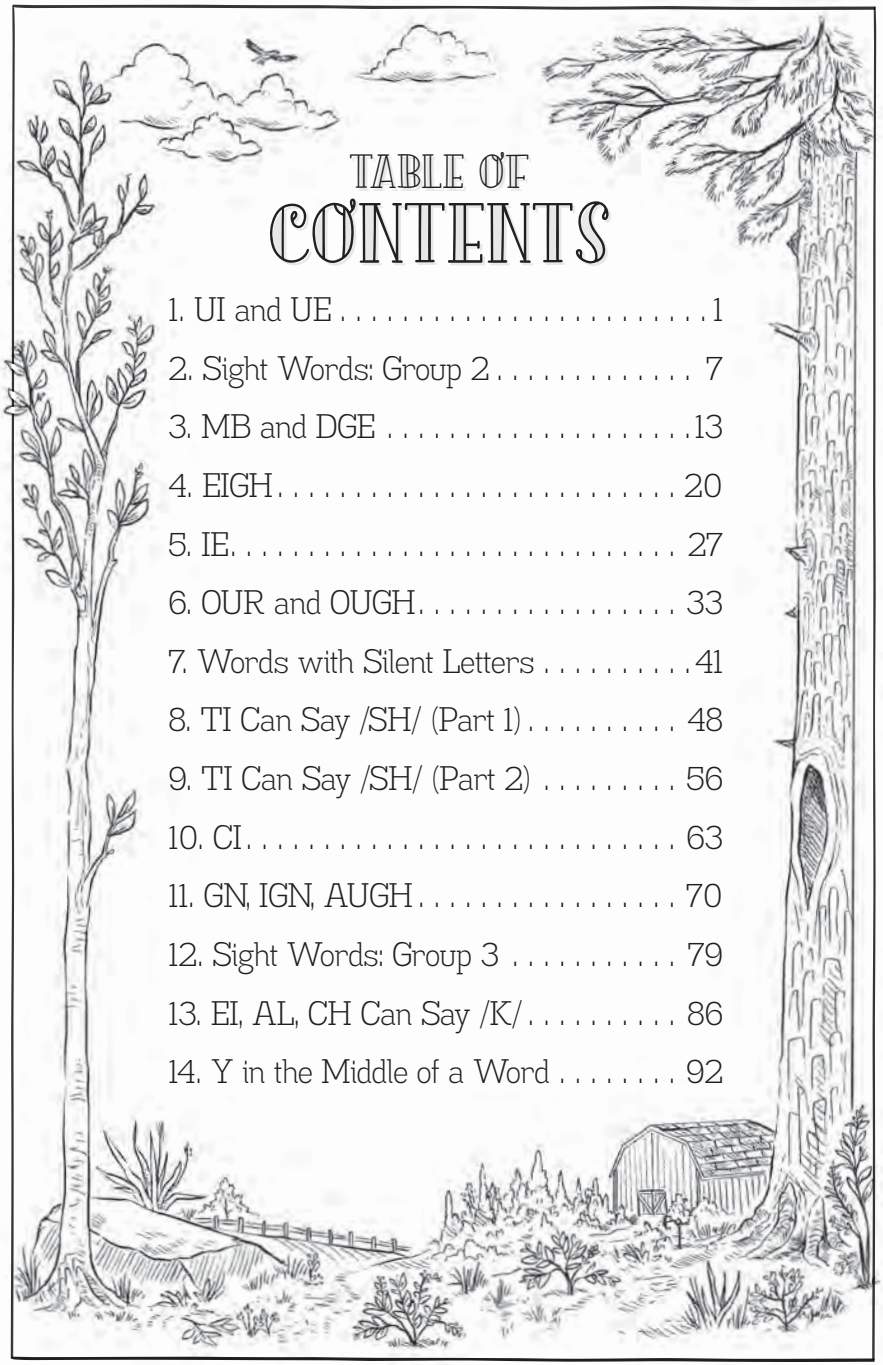


TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. UI and UE 1
2. Sight Words: Group 2 7
3. MB and DGE 13
4. EIGH 20
5. IE 27
6. OUR and OUGH 33
7. Words with Silent Letters 41
8. TI Can Say /SH/ (Part 1) 48
9. TI Can Say /SH/ (Part 2) 56
10. CI 63
11. GN, IGN, AUGH 70
12. Sight Words: Group 3 79
13. EI, AL, CH Can Say /K/ 86
14. Y in the Middle of a Word 92



Challenge Words:
heard
species

Chapter 1

UI and UE

Student

A sudden gust of wind cr<u>ui</u>sed down through the pine trees that covered the steep hillside. It circled around a little white home with bl<u>ue</u> shutters, and then it swirled the dark hair of a 14-year-old girl named Molly. She was standing in the backyard of her new home, admiring the pink and orange h<u>ue</u>s of the sunset.

Parent/Teacher

Suddenly, there was a loud clattering, and Molly whirled around. The sound had come from the shed in the yard, but she didn't see anything. Then something thumped against the shed wall, and Molly was sure that she saw a flash of white go past the shed window. As fast as her legs could carry her, Molly flew into the house and slammed and locked the door. She lived with her father in the cozy little rental home. They had only been there for one week. This was the first time Dad had left Molly alone at home while he went into the tiny town for some groceries.

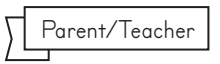
Breathing hard, Molly went to the dining room window and peeked through the curtains. The shed looked still and quiet.





She continued to watch and saw another sudden flash of white again through the shed window. After a moment, she heard her dad's truck rolling up the tree-lined avenue to her house.

"Phew!" said Molly aloud. She ran to the front door so quickly that she tripped over the rug and bruised her knee. She didn't even notice the pain because her mind was on what might be in the shed.



"Dad, there's something—or *someone*—in our shed!" Molly cried from the front porch.

"Stay in the house, Molly," he said seriously.

Through the window, Molly watched her dad walk around to the backyard and toward the shed. Another clattering made him pause a moment before continuing.

Carefully, he peered through the partially opened shed door. Molly realized she was holding her breath as her dad stood totally still, letting his eyes adjust to the dark shed.

Then, he turned to the house with a smile on his face and motioned for Molly to come.

Molly let out her breath and wondered what he could possibly have found. She hurried out the back door toward him.

Student

"It's a bird of prey," Dad said, "a hawk or a falcon, I think. But I really have no clue when it comes to bird species. We can peek inside, but stay behind me."

Molly didn't argue. As she took a step into the shed, she saw a few tools on a shelf and an old green wheelbarrow, but nothing else. Then Dad guided her eyes with his finger to a far corner. A large bird was standing still as a statue, watching them with huge yellow-ringed black eyes. It held one wing out oddly.

Parent/Teacher

"It's hurt," Molly said. Her voice frightened the bird, and it tried to fly but only made it to a nearby shelf.

Dad shut the shed door. Molly noticed that it was already beginning to get dark out.

"What are we going to do?" Molly asked.

Dad rubbed his chin and thought. "Well, for tonight let's keep the shed door shut and do some research. Then, hopefully we can get it some help first thing tomorrow morning."

"Why are we keeping the door shut?" Molly asked.

"To keep the bird warmer and to protect it from any wild animals that might come into the shed at night."

Molly nodded in understanding.



Student

"We could feed it some juicy blueberries I picked up at the store today," Dad said. "Or do you think it would prefer grapes?"

"It's a bird of prey, Dad," Molly said with a grin. "They eat small animals, not fruit."

"Oh yes, I'm sure you're right. I didn't get any small animals at the store," Dad said with a laugh. "I didn't know we'd have a bird of prey to rescue."

Parent/Teacher

Molly and her dad watched the bird through the shed window for at least another half hour. Molly especially was fascinated by the majestic animal, sitting up straight with its curved beak and its breast poking out. She studied it in the dim light until it got too dark to see anymore. Then she and her dad walked back to the house.

What would happen to the bird? Molly thought about this question as she gazed out her bedroom window at the star-filled sky for a long time before she fell asleep.

When she woke up in the morning, her first thought was of the injured bird in their shed. She hurried and got dressed and pulled on her shoes.

"Let's go see our bird of prey, Dad!" she called as she ran down the stairs.

Challenge Words:
surprised
pouring

Chapter 2

Sight Words: Group 2

Student

It was a pleasant Saturday morning. Molly had opened the shed door just enough to slip inside and watch the bird of prey. Her quiet, gentle voice seemed to calm the bird. It stopped trying to get away from her and became curious, watching Molly with unblinking eyes. Molly watched the bird with equal interest, admiring its strength, its beauty, the curve of its beak, and the length of its talons.

Parent/Teacher

Molly's dad had been in the house making phone calls, and he hurried out to tell Molly his discovery. Just a mile and a half away, a veterinarian named Dr. Thompson ran a licensed wildlife rescue center at his home with the help of a few hired workers and his family.

"He's going to come here to pick up the bird within the next hour," he told Molly. "I let him know that my daughter found the bird, and he said he'll bring his kids along to meet you."

Molly smiled. "Good! I'll finally get to meet some kids here."

Student

Before long, a large white van pulled up. A side door slid open, and Molly was surprised to see children come pouring out of the van like a fountain. She had expected two, maybe three children to arrive with the wildlife rescuer, but certainly not a van-full! *Two, three, four, five, six*, Molly counted in her head.

Parent/Teacher

The veterinarian and his children walked directly to the shed where Molly's father greeted them. Molly suddenly felt very shy around all of these new people.

"Hello! I'm Dr. Thompson," the man said with a kind and jolly voice. "Welcome to the area! It's wonderful to have new neighbors. These are my children." The friendly children all smiled and waved warmly.

Molly's father introduced himself and his daughter. She thought for a moment that she must be seeing in double, for each of the children had an identical twin!





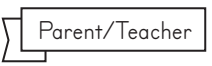
As far as Molly could tell, each set of twins looked exactly the same. The boys even had matching lizards perched on their shoulders!

"What are those?" Molly asked.

"They're bearded dragons," one of the boys answered eagerly.

"May I touch one?" Molly asked.

"Touch her?" the other boy said with a huge grin. "You can hold her!"



Quicker than Molly could say "No, thank you," the boy lifted the bearded dragon off his shoulder and set it into Molly's hands. Its scaly body and pointy little claws felt very strange and made Molly nervous at first, but the dragon neither scratched nor clawed nor tried to get away. After a moment, Molly smiled.

"She likes you," the boy told Molly kindly.

"Leo and Lyle are my reptile and amphibian experts," Dr. Thompson explained. "They've had quite the assortment of rescue snakes, frogs, lizards, and turtles at our home." Then he pointed to his youngest twin daughters. "Paisley and Poppy love to take care of the mammals."

"We just got a rescue donkey!" said either Paisley or Poppy, for Molly didn't know which was which.

"Her hooves were too long and she could barely walk when she first came to us," the other twin finished.

Student

"Tara and Tilly play piano duets all over the state," Dr. Thompson said of the older girls. "They're also my bird experts, so they were extra excited to come with me this morning."

Molly told Tara and Tilly that the injured bird was inside the shed, in the corner past the shelves and drawers.

Parent/Teacher

Either Tara or Tilly unfolded a light blanket that had been tucked under her arm. The other wore huge leather gloves. The twins went into the shed with the blanket opened wide in front of them. One of the twins dropped the blanket gently over the bird. The other knelt down and gently scooped the bird up, facing it away from her body with its wings tucked in and its head out of the blanket.

The twin holding the bird turned to Molly. "I'm Tilly. You found an incredible bird! This is a peregrine falcon. They're the fastest birds in the world. When they swoop down to catch prey, they go up to 200 miles per hour!"

Then Tara spoke. "This one is a male. You can tell by how much white he has on his breast and also by his size. A female peregrine falcon would be even bigger than he is."

Molly was impressed with their knowledge and also their friendliness. "Is he going to be okay?" she asked.

Dr. Thompson answered. "We'll do x-rays and an exam. The goal is to release him into the wild again one day."



Student

Molly and her father chatted with the Thompson family as they walked back to their van. Molly asked which school they all went to.

"We homeschool!" Leo or Lyle said.

"We have a really fun class," the other said. "In fact, we get to do something really fun on Monday. You should come join us!"

"Yes, you should come!" Paisley or Poppy said. Molly noticed then that the two youngest twins were missing identical front teeth.

Parent/Teacher

"What are you going to do on Monday?" Molly asked.

One of the children suggested they keep it a surprise, and the others all agreed, but they begged Molly to come. Molly asked her dad for permission, which he happily gave.

"See you on Monday then!" the children called as they piled into the van.

Molly smiled and waved as the van pulled away. It was a wonderful feeling to have made some friends in this new town.

She wondered as she watched the van rumble down the lane what would happen to the peregrine falcon. Then she wondered what the homeschool class would be like next week and why they wanted to keep it a surprise.

Chapter 3

MB and DGE



As soon as the blue truck pulled up to the Thompson home, it was swarmed by children and animals. Molly and her dad climbed out of the truck to a friendly greeting from all three sets of twins, two dogs, a few chickens, and a small donkey with huge ears.



The twin boys, Leo and Lyle, also had their bearded dragons perched on their shoulders.

A small, lovely woman wearing a sunhat walked up to the newcomers, gave a small bow, and introduced herself as Sakura Thompson. "It's so good to finally meet you, Molly," she said kindly. "The children have been so excited about you joining us for school today."

Molly thanked her, said goodbye to her dad, and then followed the family to their backyard, which was lined with clean and well-organized animal pens. Several peacocks, two spotted baby deer, a red fox, and a herd of ten or fifteen goats had their own areas.

"We have more animals, too!" Leo or Lyle told her. "We can show you after we launch our rockets!"

"Rockets?" Molly exclaimed in surprise.

Student

The other boy nudged his twin with his elbow. "It was going to be a surprise!" he whispered loudly.

At the edge of the backyard, the group followed a small trail, somewhat hidden by a cluster of hedges. They wound their way around low tree limbs, wedged their way between two large rocks, and crossed a stream on a wooden bridge.



Parent/Teacher

The path then opened to a beautiful green meadow, backdropped by layers of foothills and a snowcapped mountain peak. Molly stopped and took in a deep breath, for she was captivated by the magnificent view.

It took her a moment to realize the other children had continued to the center of the meadow and were pulling items out of a large box.

Molly joined the rest of them and, feeling their excitement, couldn't help but feel excited herself.



Student

One of the younger twins handed Molly some parts—a tube, a cone, and some other gadgets she didn't recognize. They all worked together building model rockets. When they were stumped on how to do anything, they helped one another. Mrs. Thompson helped where she was needed, never telling them they were doing it wrong, but often giving them a thumbs up for figuring it out together.

Parent/Teacher



It took three or four hours, but it seemed to Molly like no time at all before they had several small rockets ready for launch.

As fun as it was to build them, it was even more thrilling to see the rockets launch into the sky! One rocket did a little puff but never made it off the ground. One went up thirty feet or so before performing a loop-the-loop and then smashing into the ground at full speed. The rest of the rockets went shooting way up into the sky, and all the children shaded their eyes from the sun to watch as the parachute deployed and the rocket glided gently back to the earth. Molly cheered and laughed with each rocket launch, realizing that this was the most she had smiled since before her move to this new town.

Student

During the morning, Molly figured out how to tell the twin girls apart. Tara had bangs, but Tilly did not. Likewise, Paisley had pierced ears with cute little lamb earrings, while Poppy's ears were not pierced at all. No matter how much Molly tried, though, she could not figure out how to tell Leo and Lyle apart.

Parent/Teacher

At one point, she asked them if they had any tips for her, but the boys only grinned and told her that there was one really easy way to tell them apart, but they wanted her to figure it out.

Molly turned to Tara and said, "This was the most fun I've had in a long time. Is this what homeschool is always like? I thought it would be just like school, except at home, with your mom as your teacher."

Tara smiled. "I guess every family does it differently, but for our homeschool, we have lots of teachers. Our mom, our dad, books, the animals, cooking meals, cleaning together, watching documentaries, fixing bikes, building stuff—we learn from pretty much everything we do!"

Tilly jumped in. "Lately we've been interested in learning about aerospace science, which is the science of flight. That's why we built model rockets today."

Molly had been wondering all weekend how the peregrine falcon was doing, and this felt like the perfect opportunity to ask. "Speaking of flight," she said, "how's the falcon doing?"

Student

"He's doing great!" Tilly answered. She explained that they discovered a fracture in his wing, but that it was a clean break. They were able to numb the wing and bandage it, and they expected it to heal perfectly.

Parent/Teacher

"You should come see him!" Tara added enthusiastically.

That was exactly the invitation Molly was hoping for. Together, they cleaned up all the rocket pieces and carried them back to the house. Then Tara and Tilly took Molly to a red barn, which Tilly called "the birdhouse." She swung open a huge wooden door. Inside there were several large bird pens. The twins led Molly straight to the peregrine falcon.

He stared her straight in the eyes, the same way he had done when she sat with him in the shed. Somehow, she thought, he looked like royalty, holding his head high and proud, full of courage and majesty. Yet there also seemed to be a softness in his eyes.

Is it sadness? she wondered.



Student

Tara and Tilly pulled Molly away from the falcon's cage to show her the other birds they were caring for—a huge rooster, a small flock of partridges, and a long-legged crane.

"Molly, what school do you go to?" Tilly asked while they watched the birds together.

Molly thought of her last home, where she and her dad had only lived for a year before moving again.

Parent/Teacher

It felt to Molly like they were always moving from town to town because of her dad's job. Even their new rental home only had a six-month contract, so Molly knew they would have to move again in a few short months.

"I guess I'll be starting at the local high school this fall," she answered. "I've switched schools almost every year since I was nine, so I feel like I always have to start over with meeting people."

The twins looked at her sympathetically. "Hey, I have an idea!" Tara said. "On Friday our homeschool group is meeting at a falconer's house to learn about falconry, and he has several different birds of prey to show us. I really think you'd enjoy it, and you can meet some new friends there."

As soon as Molly's dad picked her up, she got his permission to go to the falconer's house on Friday. He even said he could probably take the afternoon off work to go with her. Molly didn't know whether she was more excited to meet more kids or to meet more birds of prey!

Challenge Words:
falconry
general
peregrine
lure

Chapter 4

EIGH

Student

A group of eighteen people gathered in the large yard of the falconer, Mr. Sanchez, who stood at the front of the group with his son, Simon. A majestic bird of prey was perched on Simon's extended arm.

Molly couldn't peel her eyes away from the majestic bird while Mr. Sanchez described the art of falconry to the homeschool group.

Parent/Teacher

"Simon is holding a one-year-old red-tailed hawk that we call Zazzy," Mr. Sanchez explained. "God has blessed her with the natural ability and instinct to catch wild prey, such as squirrels, rabbits, and pigeons. As licensed falconers, Simon and I have trained her to hunt with us as a team. For example, we take her to the edge of a forest and release her. She flies high, scouting out prey animals. When she finds one, she dives down and catches it. In the wild, she would then eat it, but as part of our team, she brings it to us, and then we reward her with food."

A teenage boy raised his hand and asked, "How long did it take to train her to hunt with you?"



Student

"Great question," Mr. Sanchez said. "It only takes two to three weeks to train her to hunt. Then, after one year of flying with us, we will release her back into the wild. We usually only keep each bird for one year, although some falconers, like one of our neighbors, prefer to fly the same bird year after year. Zazzy is our eighth bird. She weighs only two pounds, but don't let her weight fool you. She is a mighty hunter and can reach speeds of up to 120 miles per hour! How would you all like to watch Zazzy catch the lure?" he asked.

Parent/Teacher

The group cheered! Simon put a whistle to his mouth and blew one short puff. Zazzy lifted her wings and flew from his arm. Then Simon bent down and picked up the end of a rope with a leather ball attached at the end and began swinging it round and round. Zazzy flew in circles above her admirers. Molly watched in awe as the red-tailed hawk beat her large wings, using her red tail feathers to steer her course. Suddenly, the beautiful hawk swooped down at Simon. With perfect timing, she reached her talons out and snatched something from the swinging leather ball. She landed gracefully on the ground next to Simon and ate whatever it was that she had grabbed from the ball.

"Good girl," Simon said. He knelt down, setting his gloved arm next to Zazzy. She stepped onto his glove, and he stood up again. Zazzy was incredible!



Student

For the next hour, Mr. Sanchez and Simon taught the homeschool group all kinds of amazing facts about falconry and birds of prey in general. The more Molly heard, the more she wanted to know. She had never in her life felt so excited to learn. At the end of the presentation, she gathered her courage to go ask Simon some questions.

Parent/Teacher

Simon was just as eager to teach as Molly was to learn. They talked for another hour about falconry. Other kids, from young children up to teenagers, chatted with them too, asking questions and introducing themselves to Molly.

One girl named Aspen pleaded with Molly to come to their homeschool activities every Friday. "Next week we're meeting at the bike park!" Aspen told her.

Student

By the time Molly and her dad left that afternoon, Molly had made many new friends. She was excited to meet with them at the bike park next Friday!

Simon had insisted that Molly borrow his favorite book about falcons and said she could bring it back to him when she finished reading it.

That night, as Molly's dad read on the couch, Molly sat curled up in a big chair by the fireplace under the comforting weight of a heavy quilt. By the light of a lamp and the glowing fire, she read all about falcons.

Parent/Teacher

She was quite fascinated when she read about the history of falconry in Great Britain. For several thousand years, British falconers had used a variety of birds for hunting prey. The type of bird each individual used depended on the person's rank—peregrine falcons and gyrfalcons were for kings and earls, goshawks and sparrowhawks for the middle class, and kestrels for the servants.

She discovered that kestrels are amazing little birds of prey. The book explained that kestrels are able to hover in one place in the sky, like a helicopter, to watch for field mice, and then dive down and catch the little rodents.



Student

Molly yawned. She realized she was getting very sleepy, so she closed the book. As she watched the flames dance slowly in the fireplace, she thought of the injured peregrine falcon she had found in the shed. She imagined him soaring above her out in a meadow, beating his wings at incredible heights. A sudden longing for adventures with the falcon filled her heart and mind.

Parent/Teacher

The ringing of her dad's phone snapped her out of her thoughts.

"Excuse me, Molly," he said. "I need to take this call." He hurried from the living room to the kitchen to answer the phone.

"Wonderful! Yes, I can meet you there tomorrow," she heard him say. "This is very exciting. But I don't want Molly to know anything about this. Can we meet during my lunch break? Twelve o'clock sounds good. I'll see you then."

Molly greeted her dad when he came in. "Hi, Dad. What was that about?"

"Oh," he said, looking uncomfortable. "I didn't realize you could hear me. It's nothing you need to worry about. Now tell me, what was your favorite bird you saw today?"

Molly tried to answer his question, but she couldn't shake the mysterious phone conversation from her mind.

Challenge Word:
chocolate

Chapter 5

IE

Student

It didn't take long for the smell of warm blackberry p<u>ie</u> and chocolate chip cook<u>ie</u>s to fill every room in the Thompson home.

Molly had helped pick berr<u>ie</u>s for the p<u>ie</u>s that morning and couldn't wait to try a p<u>ie</u>ce.



Parent/Teacher

As Mrs. Thompson served milk and pie and cookies to the children, Molly studied Leo's and Lyle's faces. She looked for a mole or a freckle or some other way to tell the boys apart. Nothing. She leaned closer to look at their eyes. No, that wasn't it; they had identical brown eyes.

Student

Poppy started to giggle. "Are you still trying to tell them apart?" she asked.

Molly laughed. "Yes! I can't believe you're all keeping it a secret from me!"

"You'll figure it out. It's so easy!" the boys said with a smile.

Parent/Teacher

They all chatted as they enjoyed their desserts together. The boys talked about a green snake they had rescued once from a fishing net by the river. Poppy and Paisley told Molly about a pair of baby red foxes they had bottle-fed last spring before releasing them into the wild. Finally, Tilly and Tara told Molly about the time a young barn owl got stuck in a drainage pipe and they rescued it.

Molly loved hearing about all the animals the Thompsons helped, but ever since she had gotten up close to the beautiful peregrine falcon in her shed, she especially loved to hear about wild bird rescues.

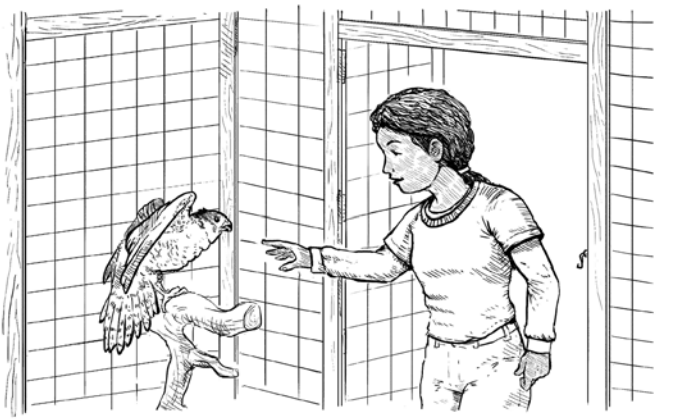
After dessert, the children were all sent out to do their evening chores. Since Molly didn't have any assigned chores, she thought it would be a good time to go see the falcon.

Thinking about how beautifully Simon and Zazzy, the red-tailed hawk, worked together, Molly eagerly hurried to the bird barn, opened the big door, and walked directly to the falcon's cage.

Student

Molly unlatched the cage door, opened it just wide enough to fit through, and went in.

"Hello, little friend," she spoke softly. The falcon watched her with big eyes, still as a statue. Molly reached gently out to stroke his gleaming feathers. The falcon suddenly let out a piercing shriek and tried to bite Molly's finger!



Parent/Teacher

Taken completely by surprise, Molly jumped back in alarm. She lost her footing and fell back against the cage. She certainly had not expected the falcon to try to bite her! After all, she had helped rescue him.

Molly looked up and realized that the falcon had gotten out of his cage and was headed straight for the wide-open barn door!



Student

Molly could hardly believe how fast the falcon could move despite being unable to fly. She chased after him.

"Stop!" she cried. "Please stop!"

But when she reached the barn door, she saw the falcon hopping into the forested area between the Thompsons' yard and the field where they had launched rockets.

Parent/Teacher

Some of the Thompson children heard the commotion and hurried over to see what was the matter. Molly breathlessly explained how she had accidentally let the falcon escape.

When Tilly asked, "You left both the cage door *and* the barn door open?" Molly felt even more miserable and began to cry.

Tilly hugged her, "Aww, don't cry, Molly. We should have warned you about leaving the doors open. We'll do everything we can to find the falcon."

Paisley went to fetch her parents to come help while the rest of the children began searching the area where the falcon entered the forest. Together, everybody searched and searched. When Molly's dad arrived at sunset to pick Molly up, he joined the search for the injured falcon.

Student

The orange glow of twilight faded into dimness and then blackness. The details of the trees and bushes could no longer be seen by the searchers. Molly felt sick with grief and worry, knowing that the falcon was not ready to be back in the wild with his injured wing.

When Doctor Thompson called off the search for the night, Molly cried again. "He could die out there," she told her dad sadly.

Parent/Teacher

Her dad tried to reassure her on the drive home that they could look for the falcon again in the morning, but Molly would not be comforted. The shadows of the night felt eerie. The falcon was out there somewhere, injured, unable to fly away from predators of the night, unable to hunt for food.

When Molly got into bed, her dad came in with his Bible. He read to her from John, Chapter 14. "'Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.'" Then he looked up. "Molly, Jesus can give you peace even when nothing in the world can. Let Him comfort you."

He kissed her forehead goodnight and left her alone in the dark. She looked out at the cloudy night sky, realizing with dismay that it was probably going to rain.

"Please help the falcon," she prayed.

Chapter 6

OUR and OUGH



At sunrise the next morning, Molly and her dad pulled up to the Thompson home. Molly's dad understood how t<u>ough</u> it had been for her to worry about the lost and injured falcon thr<u>ough</u> the night.

Rain had p<u>our</u>ed down during much of the night, en<u>ough</u> to soak the ground completely. That, of c<u>our</u>se, only made Molly worry more.



The Thompsons quickly joined Molly and her dad in the backyard to organize a search party. They decided to split into teams.

Poppy, Paisley, and Mrs. Thompson formed one team. They had the idea that perhaps their dogs, Honey and Jet, could help track the falcon by sniffing it out. They leashed the two dogs, walked them to the falcon's cage for a sniff, and said, "Go find that bird!"

Honey, the spotted dog, immediately felt the excitement of the hunt, let out a wild howl, and ran straight out of the barn, across the yard, and to a small shed. Poppy, who held the other end of the leash, could barely stay on her feet to keep up. The rest of the team ran after Honey and Poppy.



Student

They all thought how wonderful it would be to find the falcon so quickly. When they opened the shed door, though, they were soon disappointed, for Honey went in and scratched at a large bin they knew very well.

"Oh, Honey," Mrs. Thompson said in dismay. "I ought to have known you would go straight to the dog food!"

Poppy and Paisley laughed and scooped some breakfast into Honey's and Jet's bowls.

Parent/Teacher

Meanwhile, Leo and Lyle paired up to form another team. Their idea was to fly a small drone with a camera on it over the forest and fields, for one time they had used the drone to find the place Tilly and Tara were picnicking in a meadow and had delivered a note from their mom.

While Leo operated the drone controls, Lyle watched the screen carefully for any sign of the injured falcon.

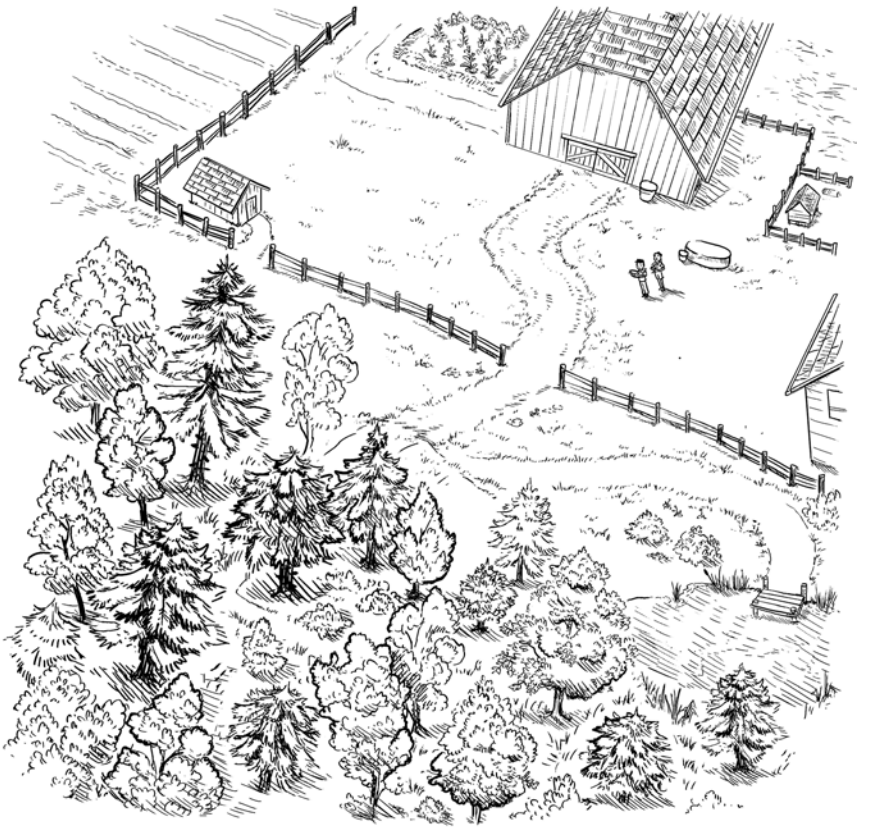
Over the trees and bushes the drone flew, while the screen displayed a beautiful view of the farm and meadows below.

Lyle gasped in realization as he watched. "This is just like the view a bird has as it flies over us," he exclaimed in wonder.

Student

Although the view was wonderful, the injured falcon they sought was not visible from the sky.

"The falcon is probably hiding away under a bush or something," Leo finally thought aloud. "Our drone won't see him from the sky."



Parent/Teacher

While the others had come up with creative ways to search for the lost falcon, Molly, Tilly, Tara, and the dads had taken the simplest, most straightforward approach. They went directly to the place Molly had last seen the falcon disappear into the trees and looked for tracks.

They were all grateful that the rain had stopped, but the ground was muddy now, and any tracks the falcon may have made the evening before in his frantic escape were already washed away.

Undeterred, the searchers looked anywhere they thought the falcon may have gone.

"Think like an injured bird," Tara said at one point.

"If I were an injured bird, I'd try to get as far away as possible, as quickly as possible," Tilly responded.



Student

Molly thought about it. "If I were an injured bird," she whispered to herself, "I would seek shelter from the rain."

Following her gut feeling, she started looking in places with some source of rain cover. She looked under bushes, in a hollowed-out tree trunk, and under a rotted-out old flatbed trailer. As she was about to move on, she suddenly froze with a feeling to look once more.

Parent/Teacher

Peering closer under the old flatbed trailer, she noticed a patch of white. Realizing what the white must be, she flattened herself on the ground, not caring how muddy she got. Yes, there she was face-to-face with the falcon! In a rapid series of emotions, she at once felt great excitement at finding the bird and, immediately after, a wave of fear that he might attack her again. How would she defend herself as she lay almost flat under the trailer, arms by her sides in the mud?

Yet, the majestic falcon just looked at her. He did not attempt to move away nor to attack. She reached out slowly to stroke him. The falcon did not move; he only blinked slowly. Molly admired how soft and beautiful his feathers were.

Student

She heard steps nearby, so she called out, "He's under here—under the trailer." Quickly, the others worked together to cover the falcon with a light blanket and pull him out from under the trailer.

Doctor Thompson looked the falcon over while Molly held him. "I'm afraid he's very sick," he said. "He hasn't even fought your blanket."

Molly's heart sank. "It's my fault. Please, teach me how to get him better. I'll do whatever it takes," she pleaded.

Parent/Teacher

Doctor Thompson knew Molly felt terrible, so he chose his words carefully. "We will do our absolute best to get him better. You can help as much as your dad allows."

Molly's dad didn't even need to look at her pleading eyes to know how important this was to her. "Of course," he said with a nod. "Whatever it takes." Then he added with a serious but kind tone, "Sweetheart, you need to understand that the falcon is an animal, and he's both injured and sick. He may not survive."

Molly's eyes swelled with tears, but she nodded in understanding. The five of them walked back to the bird barn, Molly carrying the falcon ever so gently like a baby in a blanket. She was determined to get him better.



Challenge Words:
medicine
immediately

Chapter 7

Words with Silent Letters

Student

For two weeks straight, Molly honored her commitment to care for the sick falcon. He needed medicine every four hours, around the clock, so wherever you found Molly, there you would no doubt also find the falcon. He was her guest everywhere she went—at her home, at the Thompsons' house, or even at the store.

For the moment, Molly had left the falcon napping in a basket in the Thompsons' kitchen while Leo and Lyle showed her their vast collection of snakes, lizards, frogs, and toads in the basement. It was quite the scene!

Parent/Teacher

One shelf was lined with glass cages containing snakes of all different sizes and colors. Their slithering movements and feather-like tongues flicking in and out made Molly shudder, which made the boys laugh.

"Would you like to hold Cornflower?" asked one of the boys (Molly still couldn't tell them apart) as he held out a tan snake with big red spots toward Molly. "She's a corn snake! She's not venomous."

Student

"No, thank you," Molly said, stepping back. "Are these all rescue animals?"

"Some are wild rescue animals," the other twin answered. "Many are from people who thought they wanted a pet snake and then changed their minds and released them or called us to pick them up."

"Leo! Lyle!" Mrs. Thompson called down the stairs.

"Coming!" they both answered immediately. The corn snake was put back in her cage, and then the children hurried up to the kitchen.

Parent/Teacher

In the kitchen, Molly checked on the falcon, who was still sleeping in the basket.

"Sons, your father is on his way home from a rescue call," Mrs. Thompson explained. "The Jensens found two little fawns out in their field. It sounds like the baby deer are a bit dehydrated and weak, so your father would like everyone's help preparing for their arrival. Paisley and Poppy are out preparing a pen in the barn. I'd like for the two of you to get two bottles of goat milk warmed up. Molly, you can help, too, if you'd like."

"Of course!" Molly answered cheerfully.

Leo and Lyle got the goat milk from the refrigerator and poured some into two bottles.

Student

They hustled to warm the milk in a pot of water on the stove top. Within a few minutes, they heard the truck pull up, the afternoon light glistening on the windows. They all hurried out to see the fawns.

Paisley and Poppy were each holding a tiny brown fawn with little white spots. The fawns were nuzzling into the girls' necks, nibbling at their earlobes, and looking for a source of milk.

Parent/Teacher

"I don't know what happened to their mother," Dr. Thompson said sadly, "but these two have been without milk for a couple of days, it seems. Let's feed these sweet babies."



Student

Leo and Lyle handed the warm bottles to Paisley and Poppy. The girls set the fawns on the grass and held the bottles up above the fawns' heads so that the babies would have to extend their necks and reach up high to drink, the same way they would get milk from their mother.

After a few tries with some drips and dribbles, the baby deer figured out how to fasten their mouths to the bottles and drink. As Molly listened to them gulp the warm milk down, their tiny tails flicked back and forth, almost like a dog wagging his tail!

Parent/Teacher

The goat milk seemed to immediately give the tiny animals strength and energy. They stayed very close to Paisley and Poppy. When the girls moved a few feet away, the fawns followed right beside them like tiny, fuzzy shadows. They were absolutely adorable!

Mrs. Thompson explained that the fawns were bonding with Paisley and Poppy, which was perfectly fine for a few months, but that eventually the little ones would need to be introduced to other deer.

In the meantime, Paisley and Poppy were going to have their hands full bottle-feeding the babies until they were old enough to transition to grass.



Student

"Fawns have no scent when they're this young," Dr. Thompson told the children, "so the mother deer can leave them hidden in the grass, and as long as they lie still, predators won't find them. Normally, the mother comes back after a short time, so if you ever come across fawns in the wild, it's best to leave them alone. However, the Jensens watched these babies for a full day, and sadly, the mother never came back, so I doubt she was able to."

Parent/Teacher

"That's sad," Tilly said, and Tara squeezed her twin's hand.

Dr. Thompson also explained to them that a mother deer usually has a single baby the first year and twins every year after that, a fact Molly had never known.

"Now there's another set of twins living here!" Molly said, making her friends chuckle. "What are you going to name them?" she asked Paisley and Poppy.

The twins looked at each other and smiled. "We've already talked about this," Poppy answered, "and we decided that if we ever got to raise little spotted fawns, we would name them Polka and Dot."

The little fawns were already very loved, and Molly knew they were in very good hands with the Thompson family.

Student

That evening, when Molly's dad brought her and the falcon home, Molly picked up the book she had borrowed from Simon, and she read a few pages aloud to the falcon. He seemed to enjoy listening to her calm voice.

The excitement of the day must have worn Molly out, for she quickly grew drowsy. With the falcon nestled in her arms, she drifted off to sleep in the big chair. That night she dreamed she was flying like a falcon, soaring over treetops and meadows with wind rushing across her cheeks.

It felt absolutely amazing!



Chapter 8

TI Can Say /SH/ (Part 1)

Student

When the early morning sunlight filled the living room, Molly began to wake. Her eyelids flickered open. Her first thought, as it had been every morning for the last ten days, was to check on her pa<u>ti</u>ent, the falcon who had once again fallen asleep cuddled up to her.

The falcon! She sat up suddenly. Where was he? She looked around in every direc<u>ti</u>on. No falcon.

Parent/Teacher

She checked the blankets to see if he had somehow gotten under them. No falcon.

A feeling of panic was beginning to rise inside her, when she heard the sudden clang of a dropped pan in the kitchen.

Jumping up, Molly rushed to the kitchen in a flash.

The kitchen was a mess!

Flour was on the counter and on the floor, a box of cereal was strewn across the room, a roll of paper towels had unrolled across the countertop and into the sink, and a pot of oatmeal was dumped on the floor. In the middle of it all was the culprit—a feathery peregrine falcon with flour on his legs and feet.



Student

The falcon turned his head and saw Molly standing open-mouthed in the kitchen doorway. In one quick motion, he lifted his huge wings and flew straight at Molly. She didn't have time to duck or run, only to lift her arms and cover her face, for he reached her in what felt to Molly like a fraction of a second.

Parent/Teacher

To her great surprise and relief, the falcon landed beside her feet, folded in his wings calmly, and stared up at her with his head cocked, first to one side and then the other, like a dog. The sight made Molly laugh!

Then the falcon shook vigorously and puffed his feathers all out, making himself look like a big fluffy teddy bear and quite comical.

Molly laughed again and asked the falcon, "What are you doing in here?" When she got no reply, she said, "I bet you're hungry. Look at you, Mr. Ruffles. The moment you get feeling better, you decide to make breakfast."

Molly got his strips of meat ready and knelt down beside him on the floor. He ate hungrily and acted like he was still hungry, so Molly got him a little bit more.

"We don't want to overdo it, buddy," she told him. "I sure am glad to see you with an appetite, though."



Student

Molly got to work cleaning up the huge mess. She wanted it to be tidy before her dad got home from the office. He mostly worked from home, but some mornings he had to be at the office for an hour or two.

While she moved about cleaning, the falcon followed her to every new location, talons clicking on the floor, as if he were her shadow.

Parent/Teacher

Molly used the damp paper towels that had fallen into the sink to wipe up the flour, which seemed to have gotten everywhere.

As she went to throw away the used towels, a small cupboard door between the garbage can and the oven caught Molly's eye. It had no knob or handle to pull it open. For the most part, it looked like the other cupboard doors, except for a small engraving of a leaf at the bottom. Molly had not noticed this narrow cupboard door before, but after all, she had only lived in this house for about three weeks now.

With the falcon next to her, Molly knelt next to the cupboard door and used her fingertips to pull it open.



Student

Inside she found two large sets of paper rolled into tubes and secured with rubber bands. She reached in to pull one out but noticed the words "Private Information" stamped on it. She pulled back her hand and thought for a moment. So many questions filled her mind. She had two options: look at the papers anyway or wait until her dad got home and ask him about them.

Parent/Teacher

As interested as she was in these mysterious scrolls, Molly felt best about waiting and asking her dad for permission to look at them. Perhaps, she thought, they were maps to a treasure on their property!

Just as Molly finished tidying up the kitchen, her dad came home. The moment he walked in through the door, Molly happily exclaimed, "Dad! Ruffles is all better!"

Her dad set his stuff down and looked quizzically from Molly to the falcon. "Ruffles?" he asked.

"The falcon!" Molly said with a laugh. "Now that I know he's going to be okay, I decided he needed a name."

"Well, that's quite a name for a fierce bird of prey," he answered with a grin. "It looks like you have quite the feathered little friend." It pleased him to see his daughter so happy.

Student

Molly and her dad decided to take Ruffles to the Thompsons' so the doctor could check him out. Molly wore one of her dad's large leather welding gloves, and Ruffles perched happily on it for the drive.

When they arrived, Doctor Thompson looked over the falcon and declared, "Molly, your patience and dedication have paid off. This is one very healthy bird! Let's keep him here in the bird barn for a few days of observation, and then I believe we'll be able to release him into the wild!"

Parent/Teacher

On the drive home, Molly felt a mix of emotions. She explained to her dad that she was so happy that the falcon was so well now, and she was even so excited to finally release him into the wild where he could once again fly free through the sky! But she admitted that she was a little sad, too, because she was really going to miss him.

Her dad listened kindly and seemed to understand why her feelings would be mixed.

Suddenly Molly remembered something. "Dad, I found some rolled-up papers in a little cupboard by the stove



this morning. When we get home, can we check those out together?"

To Molly's surprise, her dad hesitated. He got a funny look on his face, a look she didn't recognize. Finally he said, "No, I'm sorry, Molly, you can't see those. At least not yet."

He changed the subject back to birds, but Molly wondered now more than ever what she had accidentally stumbled across that morning.

Chapter 9

TI Can Say /SH/ (Part 2)



The day had come to release Ruffles the peregrine falcon to fly free in the wild. Molly still felt a combination of emotions about releasing him. Of course, she wanted him to fly high again, to soar above the fields and trees and mountains, to feel the wind rushing through his feathers as he carved his way between the puffy clouds. This is what he was created to do!



But she also knew she would dearly miss her feathery little friend. Even though she had named him Ruffles, Molly knew he was a wild bird, not a pet.

Yes, saying goodbye would be sad, but having the majestic bird of prey living in a cage was even more sad.

For the last few days, Doctor Thompson had kept Ruffles under close observation in the bird barn to make sure he was ready in every way to be released into the wild. Molly had visited Ruffles every day except one, when her dad was unable to drive her over.

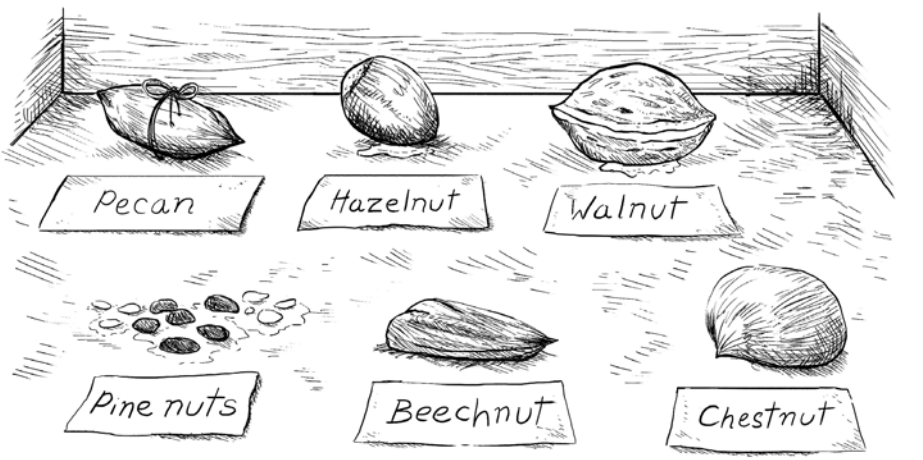
Student

Since she was at the Thompsons' so often, they invited Molly to join them for more of their homeschool classes. All in the same week, she gathered a collection of wild nuts in the area and labeled each with its name and description, learned how plants help clean out air pollution, and built a model of the international space station with her friends.

Parent/Teacher

Above all, Molly discovered for the first time in her life that there was an endless world of amazing things to learn!

Molly wished she and her dad lived closer to the Thompsons so she could ride her bike over and do school with them every day. She felt glad, however, to discover how much fun it was to learn new things.



Student

"It's a celebration!" Poppy exclaimed when Molly and her dad arrived. Knowing what a big day it was for Molly and Ruffles, Poppy and Paisley had put up some decorations in the backyard—balloons, streamers, and a banner that read "Fly High, Ruffles!"

They also had some treats set out on a table. "We tried to make falcon-shaped cookies," Paisley explained, "but it was too hard, so with Mom's suggestion, we made egg-shaped cookies instead!"



Parent/Teacher

Molly was quite touched by their thoughtfulness. "It's all so lovely," she said, hugging both girls.

"Here, I whittled this for you," one of the twin boys said, handing her a small sculpture of a falcon carved out of a branch.

Molly blinked back tears. "This is so special. Thank you so much . . ." she hesitated a moment, squinted her eyes to study the boy, and then guessed, "Leo?"

The boys grinned.

"I'm Lyle!" the twin exclaimed. "You'll figure it out one of these days."

"Molly," Doctor Thompson said kindly, "do you have any questions for me before you release the falcon?"

"I do have one," Molly answered. "Will he remember how to hunt for his own food? He's gotten so used to being fed."

Student

"He was created to be a great hunter," Doctor Thompson answered, "and he still has it in him. He is ready to be on his own again, thanks to your great attention. I wouldn't release him unless I was sure of that."

Molly took in a deep breath. "I'll go get him, then." She slid on her dad's big leather glove and walked to Ruffles' cage. He climbed onto her glove without hesitation, and she carried him to the backyard.

Parent/Teacher

The group walked to the wide-open meadow behind the Thompsons' yard.

Molly stroked Ruffles' grand head, admiring his curved beak, lovely feathers, and mighty talons. He definitely looked like he was ready to soar through the skies again. She felt a sudden surge of warmth fill her heart.

"Fly free, beautiful falcon," she said. She lowered her



arm just a few inches, causing Ruffles to raise his wings for balance. She then launched the majestic bird into the air. His great wings flapped once, twice, then again and again as he rose higher and higher into the blue sky.

The group watched together silently until the beautiful bird disappeared in the distance. Molly wiped a couple of tears and smiled.



Student

Tilly and Tara each placed a hand on Molly's shoulder. "We knew this would be a hard day," Tara said, "so we have a special invitation for you. We planned out a fun surprise and asked your dad first. He had no objection."

Molly looked at her dad. He nodded, smiling.

Tilly spoke next. "Tomorrow we would like to take you on a hike up to Creation Lake. It's up there," she said, pointing to the tall mountain, "about a third of the way up."

Parent/Teacher

"I would love to do that!" Molly exclaimed. She felt so grateful for her dear friends and for her amazing dad. "How long does it take to hike there?"

"It takes about five hours to get there and back," Tara answered. "We'll pack a picnic and plenty of water. We can leave in the morning and be back by midafternoon. What do you think?"

"I think it sounds wonderful," Molly answered genuinely.

"All right! Let's go have some of those delicious cookies!" Leo or Lyle said, for Molly still did not know which was which.

Before she left the meadow, she scanned the sky one more time, hoping for a glimpse of Ruffles. He was nowhere to be seen. Molly sighed, happy to know he was finally free.

Challenge Words:
appeared
bewildered

Chapter 10

CI

Student

Shortly after sunrise the next morning, Tilly, Tara, and Molly checked their backpacks. Molly's dad had dropped her off at the Thompsons' home early in the morning, and together the girls had packed sack lunches, some delicious snacks, and sufficient water to last all day. Tilly also brought a small booklet called "Official Field Guide to Birds."

Parent/Teacher

Right before they left, Mrs. Thompson handed them each a small yellow bundle wrapped in plastic. "There are a few clouds in the sky, and it rains more in the mountains than down here. Take these ponchos with you just in case."

The girls added the ponchos to their packs. Then Mrs. Thompson added, with a hug for each girl, "Please be safe and always, always stick together. See you this afternoon!"

With a promise to stick together and a wave, the trio of girls headed on their way. They followed a trail from the backyard to an unpaved forest road. After about a mile of unpaved forest road, they reached the Creation Lake trailhead.

Student

Through the foothills of the mountain, the trail wound around trees, bushes, logs, rocks, and after a little while, a lovely little stream. Molly was amazed by the thick canopy of green leaves above her. There were not nearly so many trees where she used to live. Only now and then did the trees open their arms to show the hikers a beautiful view of the glacier-topped mountain. Whenever this happened, Molly's eyes scanned the sky above in hopes of seeing her special friend, Ruffles.

Parent/Teacher

One time she pointed out a flock of Canada geese flying in a V formation. Another time she pointed out another bird, which Tara identified as a red-tailed hawk.

"Great eye!" Tilly congratulated Molly.

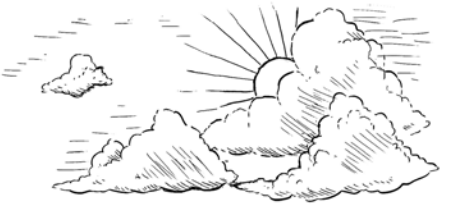
Finally, as the girls were hiking over an outcropping of jagged rocks in an open meadow, Molly saw him!

The majestic peregrine falcon flew over the girls and screeched.

"Ruffles!" she yelled excitedly.

Ruffles circled around the meadow once, then twice, circling lower with each round. Then he let out one more screech and flew off over the trees.





Student

Molly felt a thrill! "I can't believe it! We saw him! I only wish he would have landed so I could see him up close!"

Tilly smiled and said, "I think he wanted to show you how well he's doing. That's pre<u>ci</u>ous."

"It sure is spe<u>ci</u>al," Tara agreed, "espe<u>ci</u>ally that he found you!"



Parent/Teacher

The girls continued up the trail, chatting happily and thoroughly enjoying the sights, sounds, and smells all along the amazing mountain path.

Suddenly, and to their great surprise, a little brown and white bird with black stripes around its neck popped up from the grass just a few feet ahead of the girls. It stood on the trail, chirping and fluttering one wing wildly.

"Poor thing!" Tara exclaimed. "It's hurt!"

"This is the second bird with an injured wing this summer!" Molly exclaimed.

"Come on, let's see if we can help it," said Tilly.

The girls walked slowly toward the little bird, but as soon as they got close, it fluttered and flapped just a few feet farther. Again and again, they attempted to get close enough to the bird to catch it, but each time it moved just a little farther ahead. It moved away from the trail, into the trees, and even over a creek, which the girls had to hop across on stones.

Student

Just as suddenly as it had appeared, the bird flew up into the air and out of sight. The girls were bewildered.

"It's better all of a sudden?" Molly asked in great wonder.

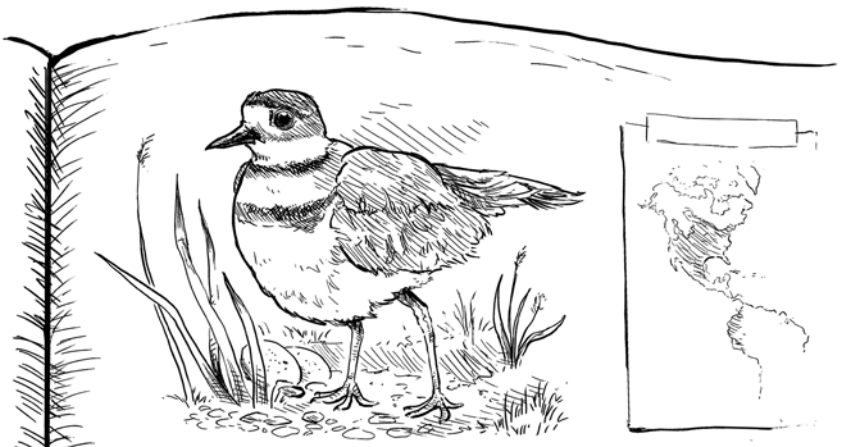
"I'm suspicious," Tilly said. She unzipped her backpack, pulled out the "Official Field Guide to Birds," and thumbed through it.

Parent/Teacher

"A-ha!" she said. "We've been tricked by a killdeer."

"What do you mean, tricked?" Molly asked.

"Look here." Tilly pointed to a page with illustrations that looked exactly like the little bird they had been following. Molly read aloud:



KILLDEER

This small and clever bird nests on the ground and lays speckled eggs that are camouflaged in the rocks.

When a predator gets too near to the nest, the killdeer pretends to have a broken wing.

Thinking the injured bird is easy prey, the predator follows the killdeer far away from the killdeer's nest. Once the killdeer has lured the predator sufficiently far away from the nest, it suddenly flies away and back to its nest.

Student

"It was only an artificial injury. The bird is fine!" Tara said happily.

Molly was happy for the bird but not for herself and her friends. Realizing their mistake, she asked, "Which way is the trail?"

The twins looked around. "I think it's that way," they both said at the same time. Unfortunately, they were pointing in very different directions.

Parent/Teacher

Just as it dawned on them that they were lost, it began to rain. "Let's hide out under that tree and eat our lunch," Tara suggested. "When it stops raining, we can find the trail."

The girls dashed for shelter under the big tree, where they put on their ponchos and ate their sack lunches while they waited for the rain to die down.

Only, the rain got worse. Thunder cracked above them, and a wall of water poured from the sky.

"This isn't good," Tilly finally admitted after a couple of hours. "The creek we crossed is going to be a rushing river with all this rain. If we even manage to cross it, we don't know where the trail is. We're truly lost on the mountain in a storm. The safest thing we can do now is stick together and wait for someone to come find us."

Student

Molly shivered, partly from the cold and partly from Tilly's words. How would her dad and the Thompsons find them on this spacious mountainside? Why had they left the trail?

She looked at her friends. Would the three of them have to spend the night lost on a mountain?



Challenge Words:
altogether
eerie

Chapter 11

GN, IGN, AUGH

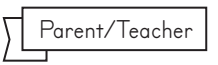


"We should have been getting home about now," Tara said, looking glumly at her watch.

It was late in the afternoon and still raining hard.

"Our parents are going to wish they had never sent their d<u>augh</u>ters on a hike," Molly said with a fearful voice. "What are we going to do?"

"We're going to stick together like Mom and Dad t<u>augh</u>t us," Tilly said.



Tara gained courage from her twin. "That's right!" she said. "Sticking together is the first rule of survival. And the second one is to stay calm and to stay put. That's exactly what we'll do!"

Molly looked at her friends. "Do you think they'll be able to find us here if we stay put?"

"We can sure hope and pray so," Tilly answered. "If we try to find our way out, we might just get more lost."

Student

After another hour or so, the drizzling rain finally died down to a sprinkle and then stopped altogether. The first signs of evening crawled in. The clouds moved away, revealing a colorful sunset of amber gold, pink, and bright orange. It was all so lovely except for one thing—gnats! The tiny bugs appeared out of nowhere and started gnawing at the girls' faces and arms.

"Molly and Tilly," Tara said, waving gnats away from her face, "can I assign you two to gather wood for a fire? I'll try to get one started."



Parent/Teacher

A chorus of howls suddenly filled the evening air. Molly shivered.

"Are those wolves?" she asked shakily.

"Coyotes," Tara answered. "They're much smaller than wolves, and they're quite some distance away from here. They're actually quite wary of people and shouldn't bother us."

Molly and Tilly began hunting around for sticks and branches under bushes and trees where they had been sheltered from the rain. Tara was trying very hard to start a fire by spinning one piece of wood on top of another, a method she had seen her mom do a few times. So far she wasn't getting any smoke or embers like her mom did.

Another round of howls erupted. Molly shivered again, hoping Tara was right about the coyotes.

Student

Molly saw a large dead branch beside a small, gnarled juniper tree. Just as she knelt down on the ground and reached out for it, she heard a sudden eerie rattling sound, and a slight movement caught her eye.

Molly screamed and dropped her bundle of sticks.

"Molly! Get back!" Tilly cried.

A rattlesnake was within striking distance, only three feet from Molly.



Parent/Teacher

Molly fell back in fear, frozen in place and unable to move away.

A piercing screech came from above. Tilly and Tara looked up just in time to see a mighty peregrine falcon, wings tucked in, diving full speed from the sky. Before the rattlesnake even saw him coming, Ruffles landed on top of it, grabbing it right behind the head with his huge talons. The big snake's body writhed, but its head was locked into place by the mighty bird.



Student

Ruffles stood on the ground holding the snake tight. He looked Molly in the face, cocked his head to one side, and then ruffled up his feathers. One moment he was a mighty warrior bird; the next he was a cute fluffball.

"Ruffles!" Molly called, finally catching her breath. "You saved me from that naughty rattlesnake!"



Student

Ruffles flapped his wings and took off, carrying off the dangerous snake as if it were a harmless rope dangling in the sky.

The girls broke into conversation, talking until the first stars began to appear in the darkening sky.

Tara tried again to start a fire. Finally, she said, "I don't know how Mom does this. I'm not going to be able to start a fire."

Parent/Teacher

"I guess we'll just have to wear scarecrow suits, then," Tilly said with a grin.

"Scarecrow suits?" Molly asked.

Tilly and Tara laughed. "We'll show you. It's a survival technique to stay warm when you can't build a fire."

The twins had Molly help them gather leaves and pine needles and other plants. Once they had collected enough, they sorted out the driest ones and began filling up their sleeves, their shirts, their pants, and their socks with the leaves and plants. Molly did as the twins were doing, and when they finished, they all had a good laugh at how they looked in their scarecrow suits.

"This is supposed to keep us warm?" Molly asked.

"It's insulation!" Tara answered. "It will help us keep our body heat from escaping during the night."



They also piled up some dry pine tree branches to make a mattress. By this time, it was getting quite dark, and the girls settled down to spend the night on the mountain.

"Look at God's beautiful designs in the sky," Molly said in awe. The sky was lit up with more twinkling stars than Molly had ever seen in her life. "Dear God," she prayed, "thanks for sending Ruffles. Please watch over us tonight and help us get home tomorrow."



Chapter 12

Sight Words: Group 3

Student

By morning the girls were quite cold and hungry. The night on the mountain had felt long and chilly, and none of them had slept very well.

"If only we had some of Mom's warm miso soup to eat," Tilly said wishfully.

"I'd take a mug of hot cocoa with extra sugar!" Tara replied.

A loud gurgling noise suddenly erupted from Molly's belly, and all three girls broke out in laughter.

Parent/Teacher

"I think we'd better find something to eat," Molly said when she stopped laughing. "I don't know how long we can survive without food up here."

"They say you can survive about three minutes without oxygen, three days without water, and three weeks without food," Tara said matter-of-factly. "Since we have plenty of oxygen, the most important thing for us to find is clean water."

Student

"Wow, that's good to know," Molly mused. "Before we start looking for food, then, we should look for drinking water. The river we crossed yesterday was pretty clear. Do you think it's safe to drink from?" she asked.

Tilly and Tara looked at each other, and then Tilly answered. "It might be, but when animals like deer or cows or raccoons use streams and ponds, they get germs in the water that might make us really sick."

Parent/Teacher

"It would be safe to drink the stream water if we could boil it first," Tara added. "Boiling water kills all the germs in it. But we would need a fire to do that."

"And a pot," said Molly.

"There are ways to collect safe drinking water in the wild, though," Tilly said. "Especially because it rained yesterday, I have an idea where to collect clean water."

She got out her empty water bottle and walked over to a tree. Carefully, she tipped a leaf to drain the few drops of water into her bottle. Tara and Molly followed her example. After several minutes, they each had only a few tablespoons of water, which they drank thirstily.

"Well, it's better than nothing," Tilly said with a forced grin.



Student

Then Tara's tummy rumbled loudly. "I know it's been said that people can survive up to three weeks without food," she said, "but maybe they meant grown men and women. We're young! We need fuel for our growing bodies."

Molly smiled. "Then it's a good thing we just did that class with your mom on wild nuts," she said. "I just found what I believe to be a black walnut tree, and it's loaded!"

Parent/Teacher

The twins hurried over to the tree Molly was standing under. Sure enough, dangling from the branches were round, green balls. Enclosed in hard shells and smooth, green husks, the black walnuts looked a lot like small green apples!

The hungry girls began eagerly plucking the walnuts from the branches.

"Listen!" Molly whispered suddenly, causing the twins to freeze and strain their ears for a new sound.

There! A low and distant chop-chop-chop sound. It was growing louder.

"A helicopter!" Molly yelled as she ran out into the open and waved her arms wildly.

Student

Hope filled the girls as they waved, yelled, and jumped up and down. The helicopter flew almost directly over them, and then it passed and continued on its way.

It tore at the girls' hearts to watch it vanish in the distance.

"They couldn't see us," Tara finally said, sadly. "There's another reason we need a fire, so they could see the smoke."

"Maybe it will come back," Tilly said, although the tone of her voice lacked hope.



Parent/Teacher

"Maybe it's a search helicopter," Molly said. "By now our families will have arranged a search party. I'm sure they're worried sick about us."

Tilly smashed a walnut shell between two rocks. "We really should have paid better attention and not gotten lost in the first place."

Tara agreed. "We know better than to leave the trail to go chasing after a bird. I guess we just got caught up in the excitement."

For the next several minutes, the girls worked to pull the husks off of walnuts and crack the shells.

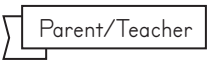
"These are the most delicious nuts I've ever eaten in my life," Tilly declared, and the others agreed.

Student

After about half an hour of cracking open nuts and eating them, Molly asked her friends, "Do you think we should try to find our way back to the trail and hike out of here?"

Tara shook her head. "I know it's tempting, but we could get even more lost. Remember, the first rule is to stick together, and the second rule is to stay calm and stay put."

"Those rules give us the best chance of getting out of here safely," Tilly agreed.



Molly nodded, but she was feeling very homesick. She wished she could tell her dad where she was. More than anything, she wished she could tell him how much she loved him. Tears welled up in her eyes, and she blinked them away.



Then she felt an arm around her. "It's okay to cry, Molly," Tara said. "Our journey turned out very different from how we planned it."

Another sudden sound from the sky made the girls look up. It wasn't the helicopter this time; it was Ruffles screeching. Just his presence comforted the girls.

Challenge Words:
sighed
adults

Chapter 13

EI, AL, CH Can Say /K/

Student

"What would happen if we drank right from the stream?" Molly asked her friends. It was early afternoon of their second day lost on the mountain, and Molly was thirsty again.

"Well," Tara answered, "in general, you could get sick with a headache and bad stomach ache that might last for months."

Tilly told them about a survival story she had read about a woman stranded on a tropical island who survived for a week on coconut milk.

Parent/Teacher

"It's too bad coconuts don't grow on this mountain," Molly said, looking up at the tree canopy above her and imagining large coconuts full of delicious, life-giving liquid.

As she gazed toward the sky, she noticed dark clouds rolling in and realized they might be in for another heavy rainstorm. Just then, the sound of thunder rolled through the air, followed by another and then another.

"Uh oh," she said. "The mountain isn't a great place to be caught in a lightning storm."

Student

Tilly clung to her twin, trembling in fright.

"We've always been afraid of lightning," Tara explained while holding her sister close.

As the dark ceiling of clouds dropped lower and the thunder grew louder, Molly took charge.

"My mom taught me years ago what to do if I ever got caught in a lightning storm," she said.

Parent/Teacher

It was the first time the twins had heard Molly talk about her mother, and it filled them with compassion toward her.

"We need to find a grove of shorter trees to shelter beneath," Molly told them. "We can't stay under this super tall tree because it's more likely to get struck by lightning than the shorter trees. We need to be far away from streams and lakes. It's also not safe to shelter in the mouth of a cave or below a cliff."

She looked around quickly, then pointed. "Over there! Come with me."

Molly and the twins ran over to the cluster of short trees Molly had pointed out. Just after they arrived, an enormous CRACK of lightning sent shivers down their spines.

Student

"It's going to be okay," Molly yelled to her friends over the growing noise of pounding rain. "It's totally normal for mountains to have these seasonal summer thunderstorms. We'll just stay here until it's over. Neither of you is holding anything metal, are you?"

The girls shook their heads. Molly showed them the safest position to take in a lightning storm, crouched down, touching nothing, and covering their ears.



Parent/Teacher

For half an hour, the dark clouds dumped a wall of rain on the mountain and flashed bolts of lightning through the sky. The girls stayed put and remained as brave as they could.

Then, as quickly as it had rolled in, the storm drifted away. The dark clouds parted, leaving a few remaining puffy white clouds in a bright blue sky. The ground was soaked, and the smell of wet earth was absolutely amazing.

Molly took in a long, deep breath and checked on her friends.

"We're okay," Tilly said with a shaky voice. "I've never seen so much lightning in my life."

"You were so brave," Molly replied, and then she gave her friends a big hug.

Student

"Molly," Tilly asked, "when did your mom teach you how to stay safe in a lightning storm?"

Molly sighed. "Before she died she used to take me on a lot of walks in nature. She loved everything about the outdoors—the fluttering leaves in trees, the song of meadowlarks, the echo of her voice in a cave, the puffy clouds, like those ones," she said, looking up to the sky.

There was Ruffles, circling over them!

Parent/Teacher

"Ruffles!" she called, running out into the open. "Ruffles, I'm down here!"

But Ruffles flew away.

"Aw, I was hoping he would land," she said. "Anyway, my mom and I got caught in a lightning storm once when I was about five. It was just at a big park, not on a mountain, but she knew exactly what to do, and we were safe."

A screech made all the girls look up. There was Ruffles again!

Molly cupped her hands around her mouth and called even louder this time. "Ruffles!"



Student

"Molly! Molly!" a voice called back to her.

Molly choked back tears and then called, "Dad! Dad! We're over here!"

Her dad and a few other adults, including Tilly and Tara's parents, appeared around a bend. The next few minutes were filled with happy tears and long, warm embraces.

"We were so worried," Molly's dad said over and over. "Are you all okay? Are you hurt?"

"We're fine," Molly answered. She explained how they had gotten themselves lost.

Parent/Teacher

When the girls finished telling their story, Mrs. Thompson said, "You did the right thing sticking together and staying put so we could find you."

"By the way," Molly said suddenly, "how *did* you find us?"

Her dad looked up in the sky and pointed to the circling peregrine falcon.

"Your faithful falcon led us here. We figured out the general area where you could be, and then we kept seeing him circle this particular area."

"Then we heard you calling," Doctor Thompson added, "and we found you at last." He pulled his daughters in for another hug and said, "Let's get you home."

Challenge Word:
opportunity

Chapter 14

Y in the Middle of a Word

Student

Seated around the Thompsons' kitchen table, Molly and her dad enjoyed stacks of pancakes smothered in homemade maple syrup with their friends.

Molly, Tilly, and Tara told the others they would never again take such a lovely meal for granted!

At the end of the meal, Poppy pleaded, "Tell us the whole story again!"

Parent/Teacher

The three girls were happy to recount the story of how they got lost by following the killdeer that faked a broken wing, how they couldn't start a fire and had to wear scarecrow suits to bed (which inspired Leo and Lyle to ask if they could wear scarecrow suits to bed that night), and how Molly had a close call with a diamondback rattlesnake.

At this point, one of the twin boys finished narrating: "Then Ruffles swooped down from the sky and caught the rattler by the neck and ate it!"

Molly looked at him. Then she looked at his twin.

Student

"Aha!" she exclaimed. "I finally solved the mystery all by myself!"

Everyone looked at her quizzically.

"I figured out how to tell you boys apart!"

"And how's that?" they asked.



"It's how you style your hair! Leo, you part your hair on the left, and Lyle, you part your hair on the right."

Leo and Lyle gave Molly a high five. "You got it!" Leo said. "Now you'll always be able to tell us apart."

"Unless we decide to switch," Lyle said with a wink and a laugh.

Parent/Teacher

"There's one more mystery that I don't think you have solved yet, Molly," her dad said.

Doctor and Mrs. Thompson smiled as though they knew his secret, but all of the Thompson children looked just as puzzled as Molly.

Taking her by the hand, Molly's dad led her out to the backyard, where he blindfolded her with a bandana. He told the Thompsons that he and Molly would be back in a little bit. Then he held her arm and guided her carefully through the yard and beyond. Molly tried to sense where they were going but soon realized it was definitely not to the bird barn as she had expected.

Finally, he stopped Molly and turned her until she felt the warm morning sun shining directly on her face.

"Okay, this is it," he said.

Student

He set something smooth but not heavy in Molly's arms and then pulled her blindfold off. She was standing in a beautiful meadow with a crystal clear view of the mountain.

"We've had to move from town to town a lot the last few years," he explained, "but God has blessed us with the opportunity to have a place we can really call our home."

Then he tapped the cardboard tube he had placed in Molly's arms.



Parent/Teacher

"This is what you found in the tiny kitchen cupboard a while back," he continued. "It's a set of house plans for our new home, which we will build on our new property."

"Our new property? Do you mean—is this—" Molly began, but she hardly dared to ask.

"Yes," her dad said with a huge smile. "This is our new property—twelve acres of our very own!"

Molly looked all around her in complete amazement. This was really going to be her home?



Student

"The house plans you're holding are based on Mom's childhood home," he continued.

Molly wiped away a happy tear. "Mom loved her childhood home. And I'm going to love mine!" She buried herself in her dad's arms.

"Look," he said gently. Molly looked up and saw two beautiful peregrine falcons flying over the meadow.



Parent/Teacher

"He found a mate!" Molly exclaimed. "And I read that peregrine falcons stay paired together for life."

"Hey, maybe they'll build a nest close by and be our neighbors," Dad suggested.

"Neighbors!" Molly was still trying to wrap her head around this amazing surprise. "We're going to be neighbors with the Thompsons!"

"Yes, and they've invited you to do school with them if you'd like to, and I think it would be fun for you and me to volunteer for their animal rehabilitation center together."

"Oh, Dad!" Molly cried. "Thank you."

Student

"Well, are you ready to go tell your new neighbors the exciting news that you won't have to say goodbye in a few months?" her dad asked.

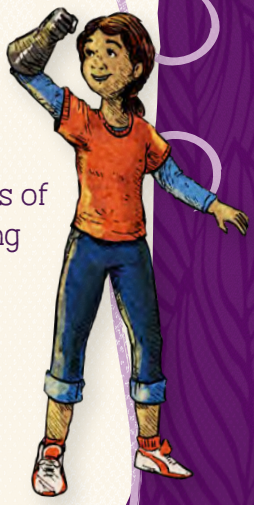
"Which neighbors?" she asked with a grin. "The falcons or the Thompsons?"

Side by side the two of them watched the magnificent birds of prey soar through the blue sky over the beautiful green meadow—their new home.

MOLLY AND THE FALCON



When Molly and her dad find an injured falcon, they can never guess the new experiences that are about to unfold. With the help of new friends, Molly learns much about birds of prey and dedicates herself to nurturing the falcon back to health. When she and her friends find themselves in a dangerous situation, their survival skills are put to the test. Parents and children alike will love reading and learning side by side in this delightful and inspiring tale.



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