

Zonderkidz®

The children's group of Zondervan

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Sophie's Secret

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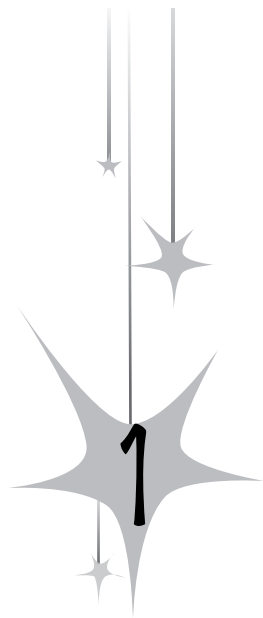
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So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen.
For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

— *2 Corinthians 4:18*

You can't **IMAGINE** what it was like!" the tour guide said in a voice that echoed



over the James River like a cranky old aunt.

Huh, thought Sophie. *Maybe YOU can't imagine it, Mister Mouth—but I can!*

Sophie LaCroix pulled her black wool cape around her—the one Mama had made her just for this sightseeing trip—and tried to bunch her long, not-quite-blonde-not-quite-brown hair into the hood to muffle Mr. Mouth's voice. How was she supposed to concentrate on the delicious realness of Jamestown Island, with this guy barging into the quiet, telling her that she, Sophie LaCroix, "couldn't imagine?"

Imagining is my specialty, she wanted to inform him. *Have YOU*



ever imagined YOURself back in the eighteenth century, acted it out, and made a film of it? Sophie sniffed. *Probably NOT.*

She edged away from the guide and gazed across the river. In the film they'd just watched in the Visitors' Center — well, SHE and Mama had actually watched it while her thirteen-year-old sister Lacie and Aunt Bailey had made fun of the narrator talking like he had a chip bag clip on his nose — the narrator's voice had described the river as “a salty brine at high tide and a blend of slime and filth at low.” Sophie wanted to repeat this to her best friend, Fiona, back at school, and maybe they could start saying that about the Poquoson River in THEIR town. It would sound so cool. So would “the drear dark sky” — which did stretch over the river on that day-after-Thanksgiving and slowly soak them with drizzle. Mama had wanted her to put on a plastic poncho, but that would totally ruin the effect of the cape.

Besides, Sophie thought, I'm sure Captain John Smith didn't have a plastic raincoat back in 1607. No, this experience had to be as real as she could make it — so she and Fiona and Kitty could develop their next movie about it.

Because, of course, that's what they — the Corn Flakes — would have to do as soon as Thanksgiving vacation was over. A “cheerless sky” and the possibility of cruel diseases “such as swellings, fluxes, and burning fevers” like the film had described: that stuff was too good to waste. Sophie stretched out her hands to the river.

Antoinette called silently to God to help her know the secrets that lay at the slimy, filthy river bottom. Antoinette's heart began to pound as she found herself at the brink of some new mission — some fascinating adventure — some brilliant endeavor that would make Papa see once and for all that she was worthy of his honor and respect —

“Soph — what are you doing?”



Sophie felt a heavy hand on her shoulder, and she had to scurry back from Antoinette's world to focus up at her father. He was towering over her, and nobody could tower like way-tall Daddy with his broad, I-used-to-be-a-football-star shoulders and his sharp blue eyes, so unlike Sophie's soft brown ones. In fact, Sophie always thought that if somebody lined up a dozen fathers and asked a stranger to pick out which one was hers, they'd never get the right one.

"We're all headed up to the fort," Daddy said.

"Can't I just stay and look at the river for a couple more minutes?" Sophie said.

Daddy shook his big dark head. "No, because next thing I know you'll be in it. We're working as a team today."

Sophie muttered an "okay" and tried to wriggle her shoulder out of his hand, but he had the Daddy Grip on it.

"No way, Soph," he said. "I don't want a repeat of that Williamsburg thing."

Sophie didn't remind him that she had grown WAY up since THAT happened back in September. *What would be the point?* she thought as she broke into a jog to keep up with him. *He thinks I'm the biggest ditz in the universe and he always will. And it's SO not fair!*

"I wish you would've let me bring my video camera," she said.

Daddy gave a grunt. "Uh-huh — then I'd have to keep you on a leash." He stopped about six feet from a statue where Mama, her little brother Zeke, Lacie, and Aunt Bailey and Uncle Preston were gathered.

Wonderful, Sophie thought. *He's going to give me a lecture right here where they can all hear.* She wished she'd never asked the question.

At least Daddy squatted down in front of her, so his voice wouldn't boom down to her tiny height, but he still didn't let go of her shoulder. It was all she could do not to squirm.

"Look, we've had this discussion before," he said.

Yeah, about sixty bajillion times, Sophie thought.



“Everything is not always all about you,” he went on.

It NEVER is!

“We’re here to do what Aunt Bailey and Uncle Preston want to do, because they’re our guests. I don’t think that includes standing there watching you stare at the river for an hour, dreaming up trouble.”

Sophie straightened her thin shoulders under Daddy’s hand. “I was starting an idea for our next film.”

“Well, take notes or something.” Daddy stood up. “Are you going to stay with the team, or do I have to hold your hand like a little kid? That would be pretty embarrassing for an eleven-year-old.”

That was actually a tough question. Sophie did NOT want to be on any kind of “team” with her own sister, much less her aunt and uncle. But the thought of trailing behind her father all day was worse. She gave a sigh from her heels that blew the little wisps of hair on her forehead. It wasn’t wasted on Daddy.

“Don’t be a drama queen about it,” he said, his eyes narrowed. “Just think of it as taking a hit for the team.” He nodded toward the statue. “Let’s go.”

Sophie waited until he finally let go of her shoulder, and then she squared herself off again and headed toward the “team.”

Antoinette tossed back her long, luxurious hair and put on a smile. She couldn’t let Papa take away the chance to pay her respects to her ancestor, Captain John Smith. He wasn’t French like she was, of course, but she thought of him as her forefather because he, like her, had been a pioneer, a taker of risks, a person who stood up against things more evil than good—

“Oh wow — he was a total BABE!”

Sophie glared at Lacie.

“I mean, look at that BODY,” Lacie said. She was gaping up at the statue.



Aunt Bailey sidled up next to Lacie. “That’s what I’M talkin’ about.” Five-year-old Zeke furrowed his little dark brows at Aunt Bailey. “WHAT are you talkin’ about?” he said.

Mama cocked her head, all curly with frosted hair, and gave Sophie’s aunt a hard look. “Thank you, Bailey,” she said.

Aunt Bailey covered her very-red lips with her hand — with its nails all squared off and white at the tips — and giggled in Lacie’s direction. Although Aunt Bailey was OLD, like probably thirty, Sophie thought she acted like she was Lacie’s age.

“That’s John Smith, Z,” Daddy said to Zeke. “You remember him from *Pocahontas*?”

“Oh, yeah,” Zeke said. He cocked his head just the way Mama did, though his hair was dark like Daddy’s, and it stood straight up in coarse, little spikes on his head. “Did they get married?”

“Nah,” Daddy said. “They might have gone out a few times, but she married somebody else.”

“She married John Rolfe, Daddy,” Sophie said. “And I’m SURE she never went on a date with Captain John Smith.”

Uncle Preston gave Daddy a nudge with his elbow. “Silly you,” he said to him.

Then Daddy gave one of those only-one-side-of-his-mouth-going-up smiles that made Sophie want to punch something. *He might as well just come right out and SAY I’m a little know-it-all*, Sophie thought. *Because that’s what he thinks.*

“Watch your tone, Sophie,” Daddy said.

WHAT tone? Sophie thought. *I was just sharing information!*

“All right, folks, now if you’ll just follow me,” Mr. Mouth was saying. “I’m going to take you to the 1607 James Fort site. I think you’ll be fascinated by what I have to tell you.” He puffed up his chest.

“Now, the question many folks ask me is why do we need to dig up remnants of a civilization that no longer exists?”



“That would be MY question,” Lacie muttered to Aunt Bailey. They rolled their eyes in unison.

“Here is the best answer I can give you,” Mr. Mouth went on. “The present is better understood when viewed through the lenses of the past — ”

Sophie jerked her head around, so that her face was sideways in the hood. Even before she could straighten it out, her mind was teeming.

The lenses of the past! she thought. *The lenses of my camera — that’s what they are: “the lenses of the past.”*

She really did wish she could take notes — although she was pretty sure she would remember a gem like THAT. Fiona was going to be so impressed.

Sophie stood on a low concrete wall so she could get a better view of Mr. Mouth. He was now shouting like Lacie’s soccer coach, but at least he was finally saying something she wanted to hear.

“That’s why it’s so significant for archaeologists here at Jamestown to find, for instance, the remains of the fort, “ he said, “because it was the center of their life, and this is where they set the precedents for our representative government and legal code.”

Sophie didn’t know what “precedents” were, but she was sure Fiona would. She stood on her tiptoes to see where Mr. Mouth was now pointing. There were several men wearing hard hats and very dirty clothes, down on their hands and knees, making tiny digs in the dirt with pointed instruments that looked like pens.

“You can see how precise the techniques are,” Mr. Mouth said. “But this is the way they discovered the rest of the palisade of the fort. It’s called a trenching technique. They’re following the white blocks in the ground where they think the palisades were.”

“Whatever,” Lacie mumbled. Aunt Bailey, of course, nodded. Sophie moved a few more inches away from them on top of the low wall and craned her neck to see the map Mr. Mouth was holding.



“We know where to dig for PHYSICAL evidence — such as building ruins and artifacts — by using the DOCUMENTARY evidence we find. This is a map left by one of the secretaries of the first General Assembly, giving the measurements!”

Mr. Mouth was so delighted with THAT piece of information, he sprayed the people who were standing directly in front of him with enthusiastic spit.

“Gross me out,” Lacie whispered to Aunt Bailey.

“We might need those plastic ponchos after all,” Aunt Bailey whispered back.

Mama turned and gave Lacie a don’t-be-disrespectful look. Sophie would have taken a minute to enjoy that if she hadn’t wanted to hear every word Mr. Mouth was saying. She decided to call him Mr. Messenger instead.

He’s like a messenger of knowledge from the past, she thought. She KNEW Fiona would be impressed with THAT.

“These archaeologists have uncovered over 350 thousand artifacts dating to the first half of the seventeenth century,” Mr. Messenger said. “They have even excavated two large trash pits.”

“They dug through the *garbage*?” Lacie said.

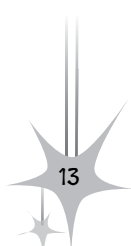
This time it didn’t come out in a whisper, and Mr. Messenger turned to her with wide eyes, as if he were overjoyed that she’d asked that question.

“Yes, young lady!” he said. “You would be amazed what we can learn about a society from its refuse. In fact, well-preserved trash is a Jamestown treasure!”

Sophie made a mental note of that. Lacie turned to Aunt Bailey and wrinkled her nose.

“I don’t think I’d want to know THAT bad,” she murmured.

“As you can see,” Mr. Messenger said, “they are still working. Where I’m going to take you next, they are excavating what may have been a graveyard.”



“This just keeps getting better and better,” Aunt Bailey whispered. “First old garbage, now dead bodies.”

“And then we’ll watch the further excavation of a well,” Mr. Messenger continued. “They’ve already found a metal armor breastplate — ”

“Now THAT’s a bra,” Aunt Bailey said behind her hand to Lacie. “Speaking of bras, we need to go shopping. I know you’re wearing the wrong size right now.”

Sophie could feel her face going crimson. She checked out her parents to see if they were hearing all this, but Mama was deep in conversation with one of the archaeologists, and Daddy was watching Mama, his arms folded and his head bent toward Uncle Preston.

“What do you want to bet Lynda is at this moment giving that guy directions to our home?” Sophie heard Daddy say. “The woman never meets a stranger.”

Mr. Messenger was winding up his explanation before they moved on, and Sophie was now having a harder time focusing on him with all those other conversations going on around her. She leaned out just a tiny bit more.

“When we go into the tent where the archaeologists are working on the well site,” Mr. Messenger said, “you will see them using very small trowels to scrape one eighth of an inch of earth at a time and then sweep it into five gallon buckets. All that dirt goes through a screen — ”

“Uh-oh,” Daddy said to Uncle Preston. “There go all my buckets. Lynda will be down here tomorrow with ten of them and a half a dozen gardening shovels.”

Daddy! Sophie wanted to shout at him. *I can’t concentrate!*

She leaned out just a little more — and suddenly she was on the ground, tumbling down the incline toward the river.

She tried to grab onto something to stop herself, but she was tangled up in her cape, and half the hood was covering her face.



Arms flailing, she knew she had to be within inches of the water, and all she could think was, *If I fall in, I'm going to be in SO much trouble!*

And then something stopped her, and Sophie clung to it with both cape-entangled arms. With a jerk of her neck, she got the hood off her face and found herself looking up at Mr. Messenger. She was hanging onto his legs.

It was the closest she had been to him, and now she could see that his eyes were twinkling.

“No swimming allowed, missy,” he said.

He gave her a grin and a hand to haul herself up with. She dusted off her cape, and then she curtsied.

“Thank you, kind sir,” she said.

He dipped into a deep bow. “You are quite welcome, m'lady.”

Behind her, Sophie could hear Lacie wailing, “She did NOT just curtsy to that guy!”

And she could hear Zeke yelling, “Mama! Sophie almost fell in the water!”

But all she really LISTENED to were the words of Mr. Messenger as he smiled down at her.

“You are a student of history, aren't you?” he said.

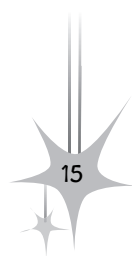
“I am. I make my own historical films — well, with my friends.”

“And I imagine they are spectacular. How would you like to take a peek under these tarps here and see the chimney foundation and the floorboards of a house they've found?”

Sophie looked over at an area as big as their garage at home that was covered with a sheet of thick green plastic, and her heart started to pound.

“Oh, yes, sir, please!” Antoinette cried. She clasped the kind man's hands in hers and looked up with tears shining in her eyes. “I would give anything to know more about those brave men and women who came before me and suffered so much for this new land — ”

“You better keep an eye on her, Rusty — she'll go off with anybody!”



Sophie turned to glare at Uncle Preston, but there wasn't even time to narrow her eyes. Daddy suddenly had her by the arm, pulling her hands away from Mr. Messenger.

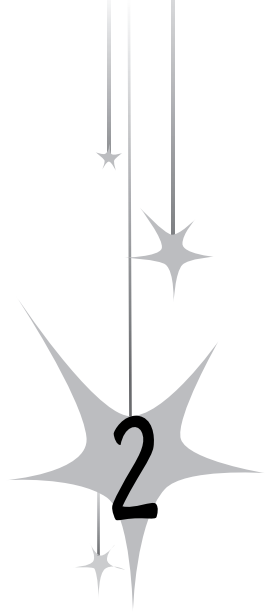
"That's okay," Daddy said to him. "We're headed off for the gift shop. We have a lot of ground to cover today."

With that, he dragged Sophie away. She barely got a wave in to Mr. Messenger before Daddy was halfway into a lecture. Something about never being able to take her anywhere because she wasn't a team player.

Sophie didn't hear most of it. She let her eyes, and her ears, glaze over.



All the way back to Popposon, while Lacie and Aunt Bailey talked about how they



wouldn't have wanted to live in the seventeenth century because there were no malls, and Uncle Preston flipped through radio stations trying to get the Texas game, Sophie stared out at the drizzle and did what she did best. She imagined. *I can't be Antoinette AND be an archaeologist*, she thought. *But I can be LIKE Antoinette and Captain John*

Smith: I will be a pioneer for all that is more good than evil.



Then she dreamed some more until she came up with the perfect name: *Dr. Demetria Diggerty*.

Of course, Sophie knew she would have to give Dr. Diggerty more than just a name, and to do that she needed quiet time in her room. So it really didn't

bother her that almost as soon as they got back to the house late that afternoon, she heard Aunt Bailey and Lacie go off to the movies without inviting her. What DID bother her was that the minute the house was quiet, with Mama and Zeke off to the grocery store to buy stuff for supper and Uncle Preston dozing in front of football on TV, Daddy came immediately to Sophie's room.

Sophie curled WAY up on the purple rug in the library corner of her room. Daddy didn't waste any words. He didn't even sit down.

"Look," he said, pointing at her from his towering height, "I'm trying to understand you, Sophie. I've had the sessions with Dr. Peter, I got you the camera, and I'll let you keep it as long as you keep improving in school."

He paused, and since Sophie didn't know what she was supposed to say, she just shrugged.

"What does that mean?" Daddy said.

"It means I don't know what to say."

"You don't know what to say when I give you all that leeway and you still abuse it?"

Now Sophie REALLY didn't know what to say. She didn't even understand what he was talking about.

"I asked you to *stay* with the group and I *told* you why." Daddy was poking his finger toward her, one jab for each word that came out louder than the rest. "But could you *do* that? *No*. The *first* chance you got, you were *hanging* back with the guide, acting like one of your *pretend* characters. We don't *know* that man, *Sophie*. You don't go *grabbing* onto STRANGERS!"

Sophie plastered herself against the wall. She hadn't seen Daddy this mad since the day Zeke had "run away from home" to hide underneath the workbench in the garage. Sophie had found him and gotten him to pretend with her that they were like wounded



soldiers coming home after a war so she could get him out. Only they got so wrapped up in the game, Sophie forgot to tell anybody where they were, and Mama was just calling the police when Lacie located them. Just like then, Daddy's face was now scarlet, and his eyes were in sharp points of blue. Sophie swallowed hard.

"Do you understand why I'm so upset with you?" Daddy said.

Sophie didn't, but she nodded anyway. He paused for a long time, and when she couldn't stand it any more, she said, "What's my punishment going to be?"

"You're already having it," he said. "I wouldn't let Bailey take you to the movies with Lacie."

It was all Sophie could do not to break into the biggest grin ever. She bit at her lip and gave him a solemn nod.

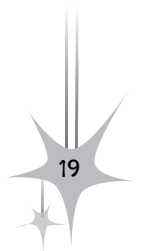
"I want you to sit in here tonight and think about what happens when you're not aware of your surroundings." Her father's voice was still stern, but at least he'd stopped poking his finger at her. "The whole purpose of giving you that camera was so you would limit your day-dreaming to filming."

Sophie opened her mouth to say, "If you would've just let me TAKE the camera WITH me" — but she decided against it. Daddy's face was returning to its natural color. It was better not to take any chances.

"Think about it," he said to her. "And for the rest of the weekend, I'd better see some improvement in your being a team player, or I WILL take that camera away."

When Daddy closed the door behind him on his way out, Sophie was sure that HER face was scarlet.

Dr. Demetria Diggerty wouldn't put up with treatment like that, she wanted to scream. SHE knows more about palisades and trenching techniques and metal armor breastplates than ANYBODY, including HIM. Nobody makes her feel like SHE's a moron — because she isn't.



Dr. Peter — that was Sophie’s therapist, and the coolest one she was sure, even though she didn’t know any other psychologists — had taught her that when she got mad at her father or anybody else that she should imagine Jesus, not Antoinette, and she was pretty sure that applied to Dr. Demetria Diggerty, too. The Jesus in her mind, with his kind eyes, could always make her calm down and not hurl books across the room, and eventually she knew what to do.

But right now, she really didn’t want Jesus to see her with her fists clenched and her head about to explode. It seemed safer to imagine what Dr. Diggerty looked like . . .

She would have to have short hair, swept back so it didn’t get in her way when she was digging up Jamestown treasure, but still romantic — maybe with some streaks in it or something. And her eyes — they would be brown and intelligent and able to see what she was going to find even before she found it. She was that in tune with the earth and all that it was hiding about the past.

The next morning Sophie wanted to call Fiona as soon as she got up so they could start planning their film — a documentary on excavating Jamestown. Then she remembered that Fiona and her family were at Club Med for the weekend, and Kitty and the rest of the Munnfords were away visiting grandparents. Sophie would have settled for curling up by the fireplace in the family room all day and reading the book Mama had bought at the Jamestown gift shop to get more ideas — but at breakfast, Aunt Bailey announced that she was taking the “women” shopping. One glance at Daddy, and Sophie knew she’d better not protest.

While he and Uncle Preston and Zeke took off to shoot baskets at the gym, Sophie piled into their old Suburban with the other “women.” Mama looked about as excited about it as Sophie did, and she barely spoke a syllable the whole way there.



Who can get a word in anyway? Sophie thought. *Aunt Bailey and Lacie never shut up!*

They didn't — not the whole time they were shopping. It was its WORST when they went to the lingerie department at Dillard's. Sophie remembered too late that Aunt Bailey had told Lacie they were going to buy her new bras, or Sophie would have faked diarrhea and begged Mom to take her to the ladies' room. By the time she realized what was happening, Aunt Bailey had already borrowed a tape measure from the sales clerk and was wrapping it around Lacie's chest.

"You have such a cute figure, Lacie," Aunt Bailey said as she gave the tape a professional snap. "I don't think the bras you're wearing are showing it off at all."

"I think the bras she's wearing are just fine," Mama said. Her elfin lips were tight. They reminded Sophie of the top of a draw-string bag.

"A good bra is definitely expensive," Aunt Bailey said. "But don't worry about the price, Lynda. I'm treating."

Lacie held her arms out for Aunt Bailey to reposition the tape measure under her breasts. Sophie wanted to go through the floor, but it didn't seem to be bothering Lacie at all.

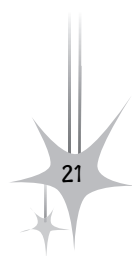
"Aunt Bailey can afford it, Mama," Lacie said. "She and Uncle Preston are DINKS."

"What?" Mama said.

"Double Income No Kids," Lacie said.

"That's right," Aunt Bailey said. "So let me treat the girl to a nice foundation garment or two." She suddenly swept her eyes, bright blue in her colored contacts, over Sophie. "I would buy Sophie some, too, but I don't see any signs of development there at all. "

Sophie crossed her arms over her chest and felt her face going BEYOND scarlet.



“She’s a late bloomer,” Mama said. She put her arm around Sophie’s shoulders.

“Still,” Aunt Bailey said. She tilted her head, its hair gelled into a dozen auburn flips, and gave Sophie a thorough going-over with her eyes. “She could use a little padded bra. That would be cute.”

“No!” Sophie said. “I’m not gonna pretend I have breasts when I don’t!”

“Why not?” Lacie said. “You pretend everything else.”

“Lacie, that’s enough,” Mama said. “You two do the bra thing. Sophie and I are going to look around.”

“Mama babies her so much,” Sophie heard Lacie say to Aunt Bailey as she and Mama moved away. Sophie didn’t look back at them, but she was sure Aunt Bailey was nodding and rolling her eyes.

“I’m not a baby,” Sophie said to Mama when they were safely in the pajama aisle. “I just don’t need a bra.”

“No, you don’t,” Mama said. The drawstring mouth was loosening up, but only a little.

“I don’t even see what good breasts do until you have babies and stuff anyway.”

Mama even smiled then, in that impish way she had that Sophie loved. “I’m happy to hear that. But I don’t want you to feel left out, since Lacie is getting something.”

“I’d rather have a trowel,” Sophie said.

Mama’s eyebrows went up as if she’d just made a discovery. “Ah, so that’s what you’re dreaming up now. You and the girls going to make the next Indiana Jones movie?”

Sophie shook her head firmly. “Better than Indiana Jones. We’re going to be girl archaeologists and make amazing discoveries. That’s why I need a trowel.”



But they didn't have trowels in Dillard's, and since they were only going into stores Aunt Bailey wanted to go in, Mama suggested a couple of pretty little camisoles for Sophie to wear under her clothes, now that the weather was getting colder and she needed layers. "Since you don't have any body fat," Mama said.

Sophie tried on the camisoles, and she did have to admit they felt silky and good next to her skin, sort of grown-up. She was pretty sure Dr. Demetria Diggerty would wear something like that.

Later, when they were waiting for Aunt Bailey to decide between four different pairs of black boots, with Lacie's help, Mama put her arm around Sophie again and whispered to her that every girl developed at a different rate. That helped when, after purchasing three of the four pairs of boots, Aunt Bailey treated them to TCBY and went on about how gorgeous Lacie was becoming until Sophie was too nauseous to even eat her chocolate/vanilla swirl with Gummy Bears.

When Sunday came, Sophie stood on the front porch and made sure Daddy was REALLY going to take Aunt Bailey and Uncle Preston to the airport. Sophie had never been so happy to see somebody leave.

Monday morning on the bus, Sophie had no sooner pulled out her planning notebook to dream up some more details about Dr. Diggerty when the two girls in front of her turned around, up on their knees, to face her.

"Hey," one of them said.

Sophie knew both their names because they were in her class, although they had never really talked to her much until she had started riding the bus a few weeks before. The one in the Redskins sweatshirt was Harley Hunter. Her friend was Gillian Cooper, only everybody called her "Gill" with a hard "G" like in "girl."



Harley was sort of husky and she was always grinning, so that her cheeks came up and made her eyes almost disappear. Her sandy hair was cut short, and she gelled it so it would stand up.

It was hard to remember that Gill even HAD hair, because she wore a hat as often as she could get away with it. Today her reddish hair, which was as lanky as her long body, was tucked up into a green newsboy cap, the kind Daddy always said looked like an old-fashioned golfer's hat. It matched her green fleece jacket and her eyes.

“Hey,” Sophie said back to them. And then she couldn't think what else to say. Gill and Harley were two of the four jock girls in her class, all into sports, and Sophie was always afraid they'd be like Lacie and start bugging her because she didn't play soccer or something.

“Me and her have been talking,” Gill said, jabbing a thumb in Harley's direction, “and we decided you rock.”

For a few seconds, Sophie could only stare. She finally found enough of her high-pitched little voice to say, “I rock? How come?”

“You and Fiona took DOWN the popular girls,” Gill said. “You didn't let them run over you like they do everybody else.”

Sophie knew they were talking about the Corn Pops as she and Fiona and Kitty — the Corn *Flakes* — referred to them in private. They were the pretty, smart, everybody-likes-me girls led by queen bee Julia Cummings. She had three worker bees — B.J. Freeman and Anne-Stuart Riggins and Willoughby Wiley. There had been a fourth one until Kitty had become a Corn Flake. She had almost had to, to protect herself against the Corn Pops. They weren't the sweetest box of cereal on the shelf.

Gill gave Sophie a friendly punch on the arm. “You even made the teachers see that those girls aren't all that, the way they always thought they were since, like, kindergarten.”



Harley punched Sophie's other shoulder. "You rock," she said.

I like rocking, Sophie decided as she got off the bus. *I think Dr. Demetria Diggerty rocks, too, and people know it.*

Thinking of the good doctor, Sophie headed for the playground where Fiona and Kitty always waited for her before school, almost bursting open with what she knew Fiona would call "a scathingly brilliant idea." Fiona had the best vocabulary of any kid in sixth grade — or maybe even all of Great Marsh Elementary.

They were on the swings when she got there, and Sophie barely let them say hello before she was launching into details.

Fiona watched her carefully out of her wonderful gray eyes, one stream of golden-brown hair erupting from her knitted striped beanie cap and over the side of her face. Sophie always thought that made her best friend look exotic.

Kitty followed Sophie with her eyebrows knit together over her big blue eyes like she wasn't quite getting it. When Sophie was finishing up the details, Kitty played nervously with her ponytail of ringlets.

"Are we going to have to act all weird when we make this movie?" she said. "It sounds like it."

Fiona pulled her lips into their perfect heart shape. "It isn't being weird," she said. "It's being an actor."

"I don't know if I can do that, though." Kitty's voice curled up into a whine. "I'll get all nervous."

"When you're yourself," Sophie said, "it's never weird. Remember — that's our Corn Flakes motto."

Kitty pressed her lips together until her dimples punctured her cheeks. Kitty, Sophie knew, still wasn't sure about being a full-fledged Corn Flake.



The bell rang and they hurried into the building, Sophie and Fiona already puzzling over exactly what was going to happen in their movie.

“I think we should do an actual dig,” Fiona said. “And we can make the movie about the stuff we find.”

“I LOVE that!” Sophie said.

“She LOVES that,” someone said behind her, in a high-pitched voice that mocked Sophie’s.

“If she loves it,” someone else said, “then it’s got to be something WAY lame.”

Sophie didn’t even have to turn around to know it was the Corn Pops.

