



Stars in Your Eyes

FEATURING SYDNEY LEE™

BY SUSAN CAPPADONIA LOVE

Cover Art by Kristi Vallant





our
generation®

This is Sydney Lee's story.



SYDNEY LEE™

STARS IN YOUR EYES

BY

SUSAN CAPPADONIA LOVE

COVER ART BY KRISTI VALIANT
STORY ILLUSTRATIONS BY KELLY MURPHY

An Our Generation® book

MAISON BATTAT INC. *Publisher*

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ISBN: 978-0-9794542-2-6

Printed in China

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who are stars in my eyes.*

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EXTRA! EXTRA! READ ALL ABOUT IT!

*Big words, wacky words, powerful words, funny words...
what do they all mean?*

*Look for words with the symbol *. They're in the Glossary
with their meanings at the end of this book.*



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Chapter One

TECHNICAL DIFFICULTIES

Last Tuesday, I raced home from school and got my math problems done lickety-split. “Stan, Stan The Magic Man” was on TV that night and I was only allowed to watch it after my mom looked over my homework.

I even double-checked all my answers. I wasn’t about to miss the season premiere of the best show on the planet.

You see, everyone who is anyone at Cedar Springs Elementary School would be watching to see if Stan The Man really can cook a stack of pancakes while balancing on a tightrope over the Galooga Gorge*. No doubt about it, it was his most dangerous stunt* yet.

My classmates and I had been waiting to



see this stunt since Channel Eight advertised it last spring—and we’d been talking about it *nonstop* ever since. On the way to school. On the way home. During recess. On the playground.

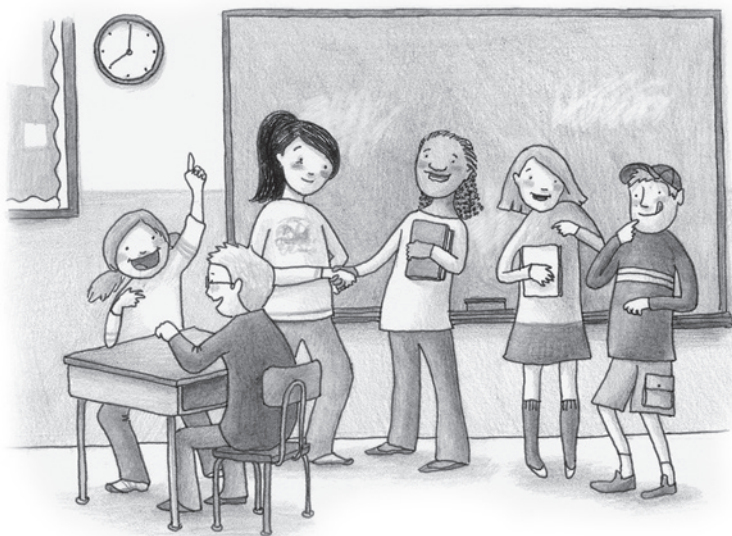
Stan isn’t just famous in my class, he’s a huge celebrity around the world. He does the most incredible feats* and magic tricks.

When you watch him in action, you can’t believe your eyes. For example, Stan evaporated from a jail cell like a puff of breath vanishes on a cold day. One minute he was there. The next he was gone. Just like that. Presto.

The ad for Stan’s hit TV series had boomed, “WITH THE SNAP OF HIS FINGERS, Stan can make a two-ton boulder VANISH! Now he’ll master the tightrope, 230 FEET ABOVE THE ROARING WATERFALLS OF THE GALOOGA GORGE!”

Before the bell rang that morning, it was chaos in my class. Everyone was carrying on about the show.





“Sydney, I’ll bet you my Super Sleuth Nightglow Pen for your Champion Pro Yo-Yo that Stan makes it all the way across without falling,” Bonnie said to me.

We shook on it. “The weather forecaster predicts high winds around the gorge tonight,” I said, confident the Nightglow Pen would soon be mine.

“I wonder if he’ll make apple cinnamon or chocolate chip pancakes,” said Stevie,



licking his lips. “I vote for apple cinnamon. They’re so good.”

(Inside Story: I’ve been going to school with Stevie since we were in kindergarten. When it comes to food, he’s always had what his mom calls “an insatiable* appetite,” what the ice cream man happily calls “a bottomless pit” and what my teacher calls “a one-track mind*”).)

“Stevie, didn’t you get enough apples at this year’s Harvest Day Festival?” teased Mary. “You ate your way through a whole peck*.”

“Yeah,” said Christy, “then you polished off a piece of apple pie.”

“Did you know,” said David, who’s also known as the fourth grade’s King of Trivia, “that almost 150 years ago a Frenchman named The Great Blondin cooked and ate an omelet while he was crossing over Niagara Falls on a tightrope?”

“Very interesting,” I said. You always learn something new when David is around.



“Do you think they’ll be whole wheat or white pancakes?” asked Stevie, tilting his head to one side in deep thought. “Whole wheat tastes better.”

“I’ll bet you a quarter it’s whole wheat, Sydney,” said Bonnie, raising one eyebrow.

“OK,” I said. “Let’s shake on it.” I was pretty sure that I would win that bet because I had read that Stan was kind of a junk-food junkie.



That night began as the perfect night. My pop had made my favorite dinner (and his specialty): Pop’s Sweet Potato Fries and BBQ veggie burgers. After dinner, I got the dishes done in a flash. For once, I didn’t even argue with my big sister over whose turn it was. My mom checked my math (100% correct!).

“Sydney Lee, how’s that flier you’re making for the school’s fundraiser* for the food pantry?” asked my mom.



“Great. I just have to add where kids can drop off the cans of food that they’re donating,” I said.

“I’m really proud of you for getting this fundraiser going. Do you think you’ll finish the flier tonight?” she asked.

“Hmnn, I don’t know if I’ll have time tonight, because ‘Stan, Stan The Magic Man’ is on,” I said. “But I’ll definitely get to it tomorrow night.”

She turned to my sister. “Were you able to find out when the audition* is for the Franklin Angelo Theatre Company, Sophia?”

“Not yet, Mom, but I will, I promise,” Sophia said, and then with a grand sweep of her arm from left to right, she pointed to her textbook. “But look on the bright side, mother dear—ta-dah! I’ve completely, entirely, superbly aced* my history assignment.”

(Inside Story: My mom is doing her best to encourage what she calls Sophia’s natural-born flair* for the dramatic*, which is a nice way of



saying that my sister can make a big fuss out of a little something.)

I glanced at the clock. It read 7:15. My favorite show was starting at 8:00, followed by a half hour of pure excitement.

I took the quickest shower ever. Fifteen minutes to go until Stan walked the tightrope. I slipped on my favorite PJs. Six minutes and counting. Then made popcorn. One minute to go.

It was time to settle into my comfy blue beanbag chair. I turned on the TV just in time to see the show open with Stan in all his razzle-dazzle glory*.

The announcer on TV said in a loud, deep voice, “IN THE BLINK OF AN EYE, Stan can escape from handcuffs inside a triple-locked safe 100 FEET UNDER WATER! Now he’ll attempt his MOST DANGEROUS FEAT OF ALL!”

Stan sparkled from head to toe, with a glittery blue top hat, matching suspenders and pants. He smiled at the crowd and took a bow.





I think I was more nervous than he was. That gorge looked very deep—and very scary.

Stan carefully put one foot on the tightrope and stretched out his arms for balance. Just as he put the other foot out—POOF! Flash! Fuzzy nothingness on the screen. The sound was a steady shzzzzzzzz...Oh *fiddlesticks*!

The TV went kaput*. And that was the moment my world began to go haywire*.



Chapter Two

SAY IT ISN'T SO

The last time our TV broke, I had begged my parents to get a second one while the family room television was being repaired. I mean, doesn't *everybody* have two TVs?

But my dad wouldn't hear of it. "One TV is plenty," he said, "money doesn't grow on trees, you know."

I would have asked my parents to drive me to my cousin Dolly's house (she's a big Stan The Man fan, too), but they'd already left for their ballroom dancing lesson. I leaped up the stairs two-by-two to ask Sophia to take me to Dolly's.

"Nope." She didn't even bother to look up from her *RockTeen* magazine. She was lying on her bed in a nest of fuzzy lavender pillows.



“Pleeeeeeease,” I begged. “If you drive me there I’ll clean your room for two weeks.”

That got her attention. Sophia looked up, opened her mouth, hesitated*, then sighed.

“OK, OK, I’ll clean it for *three* weeks, but right now we have to skedaddle—”

“Sorry, Sydney, but Mom and Dad gave me strict orders to never-ever-under-any-circumstances-unless-it’s-an-emergency take the car without permission.”

“This *is* an emergency! Stan’s already on the tightrope.”

“No can do, Missy Sydney. You know they don’t want me driving at night because I just got my driver’s license.”

She flipped a page in her magazine and added, “Hey, I’m not crazy about it either, but those are the rules.”

Rules, schmules.

“Look on the bright side,” she said, tossing her magazine aside and flipping her long blond hair back, “now you’ll have time to finish the food drive flier.”

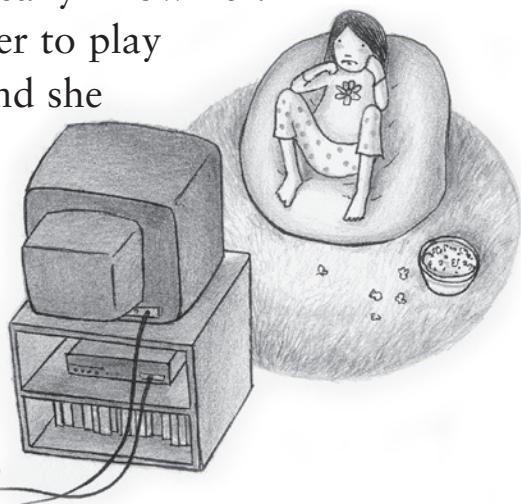


I put my thinking cap on. But it didn't seem to be fitting very well. I couldn't figure out how to catch the last of Stan's stunt.

In the blink of an eye, I thought. If I were Stan, I could be in the car driving to Dolly's in the blink of an eye.

For a nanosecond* I considered calling the new kid in my class, Olivia Hart, who had moved in down the street from us. Maybe I could go over to her house to watch Stan The Man.

But I didn't really know her. She never came over to play games at recess. And she always had her head stuck in a textbook. Since my parents haven't met her parents yet, they wouldn't let me go to her house anyway.



So there I sat. Head in my hands. In front of our broken TV. Brokenhearted.



The next morning, everyone in class was buzzing this and that about Stan. Everyone, that was, except me.

Stan had made it across the gorge. He lost his balance once, but most of the kids seemed to think it was just for show.

After making pancakes (whole wheat with chocolate chips) he roasted a marshmallow and made a s'more. Couldn't believe I didn't see that. And I couldn't really put in my two cents' worth about any of it because I had missed all of the excitement.

"Could you believe that last thing he did, juggling the griddle, his top hat and a pancake, with those gulls flying all around him?" said Bonnie, as she juggled imaginary objects in the air.



“Yeah, that was sooooo cool,” said Mary. “I thought for sure one of the gulls was going to swoop down and steal the pancake.”

“Gulls don’t like burned pancakes, Mary,” said David with a scowl.

“Do too,” said Mary, glaring at David. “They just don’t like chocolate chips.”

“Oh yes they do,” said Bonnie. “One time I was eating a bag of bite-size chocolate chip cookies at the beach and a gull snatched the bag right out of my hand and flew away with it.”

“Yeah, but that doesn’t prove he *liked* it,” huffed Mary. “He probably thought there was a burned pancake inside the bag.”

“How ’bout that guy in the front row, with the sign that said ‘Stan, Stan, you’re The Man, if you can’t do it, no one can?’” said David.

“How did he get it to light up like that?” said Bonnie. “I think that was his manager, because the camera filmed him a lot.”

“No, I think that was his brother,” said Christy. “They looked alike.”



“It would be so great to be Stan’s brother,” said Stevie. “I bet he makes pancakes and s’mores at home all the time.”

“Listen to this,” said Bonnie. “My aunt has a friend whose cousin is a TV producer. She says the friend says that the cousin says Stan’s next trick is riding a unicycle across the gorge while strumming ‘I’ve Been Working on the Railroad’ on the banjo.”

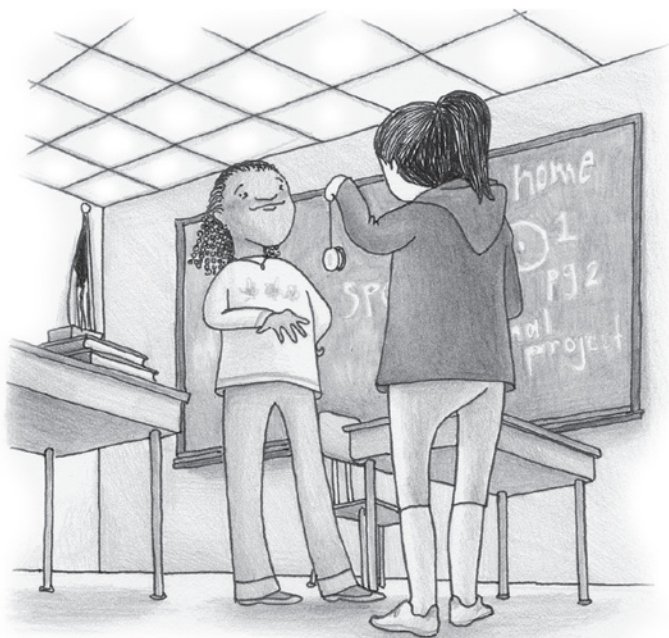
I mean, holy mackerel, is Stan *all* these kids talk about? I felt left out.

With the snap of my fingers, I thought. If I were Stan, I could make this feeling go away with the snap of my fingers.

On and on it went, until the bell rang and Ms. Frannie, our English teacher, asked us to “turn down the volume” and “turn to page 56” in our books.

As I sulked* back to my desk, Bonnie held out the palm of her hand, blocking my way. Like I wasn’t miserable enough, now I had to hand over my Champion Pro Yo-Yo.





Her hand didn't budge. I reached in my pocket and gave her the quarter I owed her, too.

At lunchtime, my friends picked up the conversation right where they'd left off.

"Stan The Man doesn't even cook for himself, Stevie," said Bonnie. "He has a maid and a chef and a butler and a driver and a—"

"Then how did he know how to cook pancakes?" I asked.



“He *didn't* know how. Those pancakes were totally black on one side! For Pete’s sake, Sydney, did you even see the show?” said David.

Everyone turned to me.

“My TV broke right when the show started!” I blurted.

“Are you saying you didn’t see it?!” hollered Christy.

“You missed the show last night?” screeched Mary.

“Did you know that 1.6 million people watched Stan last night?” added David.

“Are you crazy?”

“You mean you didn’t see Stan make that yummy tower of pancakes, oozing with maple syrup?” said Stevie. “Geez.”



Chapter Three

TV TRAUMA*

Feeling left out has to be one of my all-time awful, down-in-the-dumps, blue-mood feelings. “Fitting in” means you belong. You’re part of the crowd.

When you’re not fitting in, you’re an outsider watching the fun other kids are having. Kind of like that new girl, Olivia.

No one thought she was weird. No one really thought about her at all.

But back to this TV situation. I remembered that my dad had said he’d take the TV to Scotty-Boy’s Speedy TV Repair right away.

That gave me hope. Scotty-Boy had fixed our TV a few years ago. It was the day before the World Series* started, and we were desperate



to see our team win. Scotty-Boy said that dire* situation made our TV the shop's #1 HPR (that means High Priority* Repair).

"You're in luck," Scotty-Boy told my pop. "In this shop, HPR TVs get fixed ASAP*." True to his word, he had that television fixed the next morning.



The season's first episode of "Race Against Time" was going to air on Thursday night. That's my second favorite TV show and just as popular with my class.

Each week, six kid contestants go on a gigantic five-day scavenger hunt. They have to collect all kinds of weird things...an acorn from Yosemite National Park, a volcanic rock, a size 18 purple sneaker, a cinnamon bun that's bigger than a bread-box (they actually found one last year—good thing Stevie wasn't around).

If they can bring back all twenty objects on



their list in five days, they divide the grand prize—\$150,000! If not, they all go home with an electric pencil sharpener or toaster oven.

You wouldn't believe what they go through to race against time. It's a blast to see them scramble and search for all the items on their lists.

Today was only Wednesday. Thursday was still a good day away, so I wasn't too concerned about the television situation. Like I said, Scotty-Boy was a lightning-fast repairman. It was likely our TV would be back at home that night. I was sure of it.

But it wasn't back that night. Or the next night either.

On Thursday after dinner, my mom and pop broke the news: one of the bulbs in the TV was, what Scotty-Boy the repairman called, a VHTRP (Very Hard To Replace Part). He said the bulb had to be shipped from "goodness knows where," and "your guess is as good as mine how long it will take to arrive." Well that sure didn't sound good.



I put on my thinking cap. It fit just right so I came up with a quick solution. “How about renting one?” I asked.

“Let’s borrow Aunt Mim’s since she’s in Florida until May,” said Sophia.

My pop cleared his throat. “Well, actually....” he said, taking off his glasses and cleaning them on the bottom of his shirt. This was never a good sign.

“To tell you the truth....” said my mom, looking sideways at my pop.

I’m no detective, but I had a clue that bad news was brewing*.

“We’ve come to a decision, girls,” said my pop. “We think that maybe the TV breaking was a good thing.”

What?! A *good* thing?

“Your father and I think that not having a TV in the house will give us all more time to do new and interesting things,” said my mom, trying her best to convince us.

“That’s right,” said my dad. “Let’s make our house a TV-free zone and not watch television at all during the week.”

“Anyway, tonight is our first interesting experience. We’re all going to Leon’s Art Studio. He’s going to show us how to use a potter’s wheel,” said my mom. “We’ll each get to make our own clay pot, then he’ll fire it in a kiln, an oven that’s made for baking pottery. Next Thursday we’ll go back there and glaze it.”

“And the following week he’ll get us started on our own masterpiece paintings,” said my pop. “Girls, please try to think of this as a fun experiment and we’ll see how it goes. OK?”

Not OK, not OK at all! What about the premiere of “Race Against Time?”

I pled* my case. Sophia asked them to please, please, please (with hands clasped on top of her heart) reconsider. She deserved a standing ovation* for that performance.





I shed a tear (and more). I tried bargaining (*would you change your mind if I swept the kitchen every night?*). Then negotiating* (*how about if I pay for the bulb with my allowance?*). And lastly, I poured on the charm (*pretty please with sugar on top, Pop?*).

But absolutely nothing changed their minds. It was settled. We had officially begun the TV-free family experiment.

No more Stan? No more globetrotting scavenger hunts? How would I explain this to all the kids in my class? Would they think that I was totally weird?

In the blink of an eye my life seemed to be going downhill—fast.

Double fiddlesticks!



Chapter Four

FROM BAD TO WORSE

“Don’t *even* tell me you didn’t see ‘Race Against Time’ last night,” said Bonnie, adjusting her backpack as we walked to school.

“Like I said...my TV broke...” I mumbled.

“I thought Scotty-Boy the repairman was on the job,” said David.

“Did you tell him that ‘Race Against Time’ was on last night?” asked Christy. “He would have made your TV a #1 HPR, for sure.”

“My mom and dad are trying an experiment.” I tried to sound like it was a really super idea.

“What kind of an experiment?” asked Christy.

“Well, doing other fun things besides watching TV,” I said, with an *extra-big* things-just-couldn’t-be-better smile.

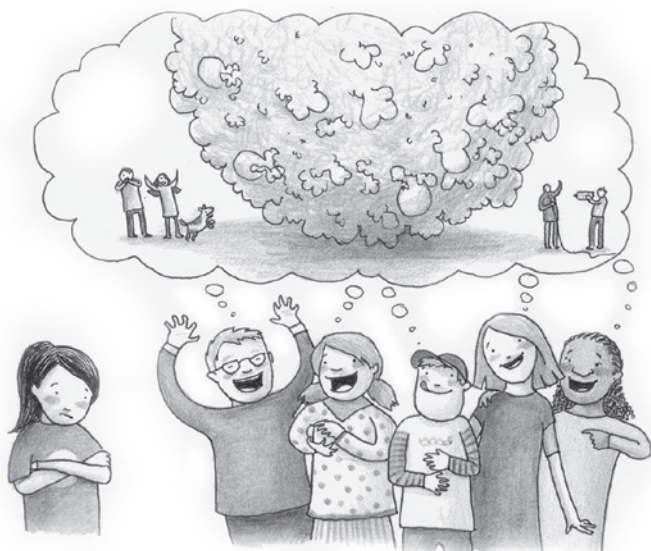


“What could be more fun than watching ‘Race Against Time?’” David wanted to know.

“Watching ‘Stan, Stan The Magic Man’ of course,” Mary said, wearing what we call her very Concerned Look. “You can still watch Stan, right?”

“Mmmmn, not exactly,” I said, feeling a little slumpy, but then with a little more enthusiasm, “but I did get to take a pottery class last night.”

“Wow, I’ve always wanted to try that,” said Bonnie.



“So you didn’t catch the part where the contestants find the world’s largest popcorn ball, snap a picture to bring back to the show, and then get to eat it?” Stevie asked sadly.

“Did you know that popcorn ball weighed 3,727 pounds?” said the King of Trivia.

“Maybe she’ll get to see them eat the leftovers,” Mary said to Stevie, “because they probably took some of it home in a doggie bag.”

“No TV? That’s just plain crazy,” said David. Then he raced into the schoolyard, toward the new girl, Olivia, who was erasing something in her notebook.

She looked up and waved at him. He tore right by her, not seeing her.

Why, it was almost as if she was invisible.

“Glad I’m not living in your house,” said Christy, then she sprinted right past Olivia to beat David to the swings.



When I got home from school, the sweet smell of cookies baking made my mouth water. My mom said we were making a long overdue visit to Olivia's house to introduce ourselves. She said it's a tradition* to welcome a new family to the neighborhood by bringing them a plate of homemade cookies.

"A wee bit of food for your very hungry daughter who's toiled* all day in school, writing a 2,000-word essay on 18th-century literature* until her hand is nearly numb*," said my sister, holding the back of her hand over her forehead.

"There are plenty of cookies for everyone when we get back," said my mom as we headed out the door. "And about that audition, Sophia...."



The Harts looked happy to make new friends in the neighborhood. They asked us to "please, please, come right in" and share the cookies with them.



“Olivia,” my mom said, “Sydney Lee tells me that you are in her class. How do you like your new school? Have you met a lot of kids?”

I instantly thought about how she looked sitting by herself at the playground every day. Always studying. Never playing dodgeball. Or tetherball. Or tag.



Why does she do homework all the time, I wondered. Why couldn't she just have fun like all the other kids? I tuned back into the conversation.



“...in math, so I’m a little behind in that. But I’ll catch up,” said Olivia.

“Olivia joined Miss Julie’s School of Dance,” said Mrs. Hart. “Ballet class on Monday nights and jazz class on Wednesday nights.”

“I love it,” said Olivia, “the teacher is choreographing* awesome dances for us.”

“How fun,” I said, trying to be friendly.

Her eyes lit up, “Would you like to come and try it out? My teacher said it would be OK if we brought guests. My cousin was visiting from Michigan last week and she came as a guest. How about coming next Monday and Wednesday just to see how you like it?”

“That sounds terrific,” said my mom, nodding her head and looking at me.

“Wouldn’t that be nice?” asked Mrs. Hart.

“Oh, Sydney, I think you’d be an absolutely divine ballerina,” said Sophia. “No doubt about it, you should definitely go.”



“Well...” My brain raced to come up with an excuse. But I couldn’t think how to work my way out of this situation.

“Okaaaaaaaaaaaaay...sure, I guess so,” I said.

And that was that. Suddenly weeknights were booking up quick. Mondays: Ballet. Wednesdays: Jazz. Thursdays: Art.

“Look on the bright side,” said my sister as we crossed the street to our house, “you’ve always said how beautifully the ballerinas dance in *The Nutcracker*. Now you can learn the steps.”

(Inside Story: Sophia is always looking on the bright side. Sometimes her sunny outlook gets a bit annoying. But this time, a little voice inside my head agreed with her. I had always thought about trying ballet, but I just never had the time.)

“You might make some new friends in dance class, Sydney,” said my mom brightly.

Yes, I might, I thought to myself. But would hanging around with Olivia make me invisible at school, too?



Chapter Five

OUT WITH THE TV & IN WITH THE TUTU

“Telephone, Sydney,” my mom called up the stairs. “It’s Olivia.”

“Hi, Olivia,” I said, a little out of breath from leaping two-by-two down the stairs and into the kitchen.

“Hi, Sydney, we’ll pick you up at the usual time tonight for dance,” Olivia said. “Don’t forget your ballet shoes this time!”

“Very funny, Olivia. If I hadn’t left them in your bedroom when we were practicing this weekend, and if your bedroom wasn’t so messy—”

“Hey, my bedroom looks—”

“Just like the inside of your locker?”

“Ha, ha, Miss Neatnik. See you at 6:00.”



I'd been taking dance classes for a couple of months and couldn't believe how much I liked it.

But I found that liking something doesn't always mean you're good at it. At Cedar Springs Elementary School, it's not much trouble for me to get good grades. I wouldn't say the work is easy. I wouldn't say it's hard either.

In ballet class, it seemed like I was five steps behind everyone else. Miss Julie said the steps would come naturally with practice.

"If you want to succeed at something, Sydney, put your heart into it," she said.

I've never personally known anybody who's as good a ballerina as our instructor, Miss Julie. When she shows us the movements, she is beautiful to watch, with her chiffon skirt whooshing and whirling around her.

(Inside Story: Miss Julie believes that wanting to do something in your heart sends a signal to your brain, which delivers a message to your body, which will eventually get the movements right.)

I liked that idea. So instead of getting



frustrated, I put my whole heart into dance. Then my brain got determined. And my body got going.

If I was having trouble staying balanced during a *pirouette* (a turn on one leg) or coordinating my body, arms and legs during a *pas de chat* (a sideways movement that imitates the jump of a cat), I didn't give up.

When I messed up an *arabesque* (a pose on one leg with the other leg raised and stretched straight behind, the body making a graceful curve), I tried again (and again and again...).

"Look on the bright side," my sister said, "being uncoordinated means you have to try harder. And trying hard builds character. So you will have *plenty* of character by the time your dance recital comes around this spring."

Don't get me wrong, sometimes I felt like throwing in the towel. That's when Olivia would step in. One day during recess, she offered to help me practice a *jeté* (a leap from one leg to the other).



All the other kids were discussing the most recent daredevil stunt by Stan The Man. I was feeling left out of the conversation and I could feel tears stinging my eyes.

So we started going over the movements that day and sometimes after school or on weekends if Olivia didn't have too much homework.

Olivia's been dancing since she was five years old. She's what you call a "natural." I think someday she could be as good as the famous ballerina Anna Reese (who is wonderful in *The Nutcracker*).

Olivia has a big bedroom with a wall of mirrors and even a barre (that's a handrail at waist height that's used by dancers for balance), so it's perfect for stretching and practicing. Her mom jokes that it's a good thing we use Olivia's room as a dance studio or it might never get picked up.





“My essay is about being the mayor of Cedar Springs,” said Bonnie.

“I’m going to write about being a firefighter,” Mary added.

“Mine is about being a famous chef with a TV show,” declared Stevie.

Ms. Frannie had given us an assignment that morning. We were supposed to think “long and hard” about a job we’d like to do when we got older. Then we had to write a 250-word essay about our dream job and why we’d be good at it.

David imitated Stan balancing on a tightrope. “I want to be a stuntman and magician like Stan.”

This, of course, launched an entire play-by-play* of the previous night’s episode, where Stan had made his assistant, Wanda, disappear.

“Did you know,” asked David, “that in 1918 Houdini made a 10,000-pound elephant named Jeannie vanish—in front of 5,000 people? Not even magicians can say for sure how he did it.”



“I’ll bet Stan used strings to lift Wanda up behind the curtain,” said Christy.

“No way, no strings,” insisted Mary.

“Sydney, trade you my radio ring for your spy glasses that Stan doesn’t use strings,” said Bonnie.

I pretended I didn’t hear. I tried to change the subject. “I’m writing about being an inventor, like the woman at the World’s Wackiest Widgets* Exhibit. She invented a solar-powered popcorn popper that automatically butters and salts, too.”

“Wow, that’s so cool. I really want to see that exhibit,” said David enviously.

“Gee, that sounds tasty,” said Stevie with a faraway look in his eyes.

“When did you go to the Science Museum to see that exhibit? I would have gone with you,” said Mary.

“I would have asked you,” I said, “but I knew you wouldn’t want to miss the show last ni—” Oh, jeeppers. Now my secret was out. They all jumped in at once.



“Last night?” “You went last night?!”
“And missed seeing Stan The Man? Again?”

Bonnie looked alarmed. Christy shook her head. David rolled his eyes. Mary pointed her index finger at her head and made cuckoo circles. Stevie stopped munching on his pear, which made a giant bulge in his cheek.

For a second they looked at me like I was weird. Like I had five heads. Like I was an alien living among them.

Then they went back to talking about the mysterious vanishing act. And I went back to feeling left out.



Chapter Six

OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS

“Attention, class,” said Miss Julie, clapping her hands. “I have a fantastic surprise to share with you.” She stood straight and tall, like she was balancing a glass of water on her head. Her eyes were twinkling.

Instantly, everyone stopped what they were doing. One girl whirled around and her dance bag hit the piano keys with a loud “BLANG!” making us all jump. Then sixteen girls, dressed in leotards, tights and legwarmers, stood completely still.

Olivia and I looked at each other with raised eyebrows and smiles. We both loved surprises. Had our costumes arrived already for our dance recital? No, it couldn’t be that. We hadn’t done the fittings* for our tutus yet.



Were we going to perform at the Glen Gardens Nursing Home again? It had been so much fun when we danced there the month before. The senior citizens* and staff treated us to cookies and hot cocoa afterwards. Then they taught us a couple of dances we didn't know—including the foxtrot and the waltz.

Perhaps we were going on a field trip to see the ballet at the Majesty Theatre, the biggest and grandest theater in the city?

"You remember when we went to the Glen Gardens Nursing Home last month," Miss Julie said. "The director of the Majesty Theatre just happened to be there that day visiting her father. In fact, Sydney, I believe you learned the foxtrot from her father, who was once a well-known professional dancer."

Oh my goodness, I thought, I took a lesson from a famous dancer?

"Mrs. Busby was very impressed with all of you girls. She told me that she thought you were not just friendly, you were also kind to



come and make a whole lot of people happy.” Miss Julie smiled, obviously proud of us.

“That is why, when she began planning the biggest event of the season at the Majesty Theatre—the “Stars In Your Eyes” fundraiser—she immediately thought of asking our class to be her VIP* volunteers for the show.”

I glanced at Olivia, her eyes were wide and her mouth a big, round “O.”

“Big-name celebrities from all over the nation will be flying in to perform at this event,” said Miss Julie. “Do you know why? The money raised from ticket sales will help the Children’s Hospital build a new unit for sick kids.

“As you can imagine,” Miss Julie continued, “the director needs mature volunteers who are ready to help out as needed and make things run smoothly.”

The rest of the girls looked just as thrilled as I felt. Everyone started talking at once, asking questions. “Miss Julie, who are the celebrities?...Will we get to meet the stars?...





Will we get to see their dressing rooms?” My instructor held up her palm to get everyone’s attention.

“In order for you to participate, your parents must sign this permission slip for you. The “Stars In Your Eyes” fundraiser is on Tuesday, March 5th at 8:00, but we will need to be there early in the afternoon for training.

“It’s completely up to you if you decide to volunteer. Now, let’s begin with our stretching exercises.”

Decide to be a volunteer? Not much of a decision for me. I could hardly believe this incredible chance to work on a show with real stars.



Something just didn’t seem right when I got home from dance class that night. I couldn’t put my finger on it. But something was out of place.



No, make that *in* place. It was the TV. Back where it belonged, in the living room opposite my blue beanbag chair and my pop's easy chair.

My parents walked into the room.

"Scotty-Boy worked his magic again," said my mom. "He called to say the bulb was replaced and the TV is as good as new. So your dad picked it up."

"I can't believe a little bulb costs \$79," said my pop, "but you know, it did have to be shipped from goodness knows where."

"Look on the bright side, caring, generous, wonderful father, it could have been two bulbs on the blink," said Sophia.

"It's been three months and no one has complained a bit about the family TV-free zone experiment. That shows real maturity," said my mom.

"Plus, we've had the chance to do plenty of new and interesting things as a family," said my pop.



Sophie said, “My favorite was the painting I did at Leon’s Art Studio of a mysterious and magical place in my imagination. It looks sensational in my room.”

“How about the night we served dinner at the soup kitchen*?” asked my mom.

“Or the night we hosted the 1st Annual* Neighborhood Potluck*,” I said. “Mr. Fitz has been our next-door neighbor my whole life, but who knew he could play the accordion like that?”

“Yeah, and who knew Mrs. Dempsy could do the jig* so well?” said Sophia.

We all smiled thinking about it.

(Inside Story: We had invited everyone the night before the potluck, on the spur-of-the-moment*. Can you imagine? A party on a *school night*?)

Everyone on the block, including Olivia and her family, had come. Mr. Fitz brought an accordion that had been in his family for years. It was dazzling—glittering gold with white and black keys on one side and buttons on the other.





The party was so much fun, we all decided to make it an annual tradition.

“The family TV-free zone experiment was a success,” said my mom.

“Was?” asked Sophia. She didn’t miss a trick.

“Does that mean...?” I began.

“Yes, was. We think you’ve made good choices and can decide your own priorities—what’s really important to you,” said my pop.

I felt happy. Uneasy. Queasy*. *But why?*

I felt the permission slip in my hand.

I felt ginormously* confused.



Chapter Seven

MORE FIDDLESTICKS

“Dad, have you seen my—” I poked my head into the living room and couldn’t help glancing at the TV screen and hearing an announcer’s voice.

“Don’t miss this not-to-be-repeated, life-or-death, LAST EPISODE OF THE SEASON!”

So the rumor about Stan The Man crossing Galooga Gorge pedaling a unicycle and playing the banjo was true. The hair-raising* preview showed him smiling, his teeth sparkling white. Suddenly, his unicycle tire went “Fff!”, completely flat, in the middle of the tightrope (*oh my*) and began wobbling from side to side (*yikes*).

“AIRING ON MARCH 5TH!” exclaimed the announcer.



Which, of course, was the exact night of the “Stars In Your Eyes” show.



On the way to school, my friends were making a big to-do about the preview.

“I told you so,” said Bonnie. “Didn’t I tell you so?”

“But you said your aunt said her friend said the TV producer said that Stan was going to play ‘I’ve Been Working on the Railroad’ on the banjo,” said Mary, “but he’s not.”

“‘On Top of Spaghetti’ is a much better song to play,” said Stevie, overjoyed that the music selection was about a subject close to his heart.

“Did you know that the Galooga Gorge is almost 800 feet across?” said David. “That’s a long walk back to land carrying a unicycle with a flat tire and a banjo.”

Being left out of the TV chitchat didn’t bother me quite as much as before. To tell the



truth, I had less time to yak about the shows anyway.

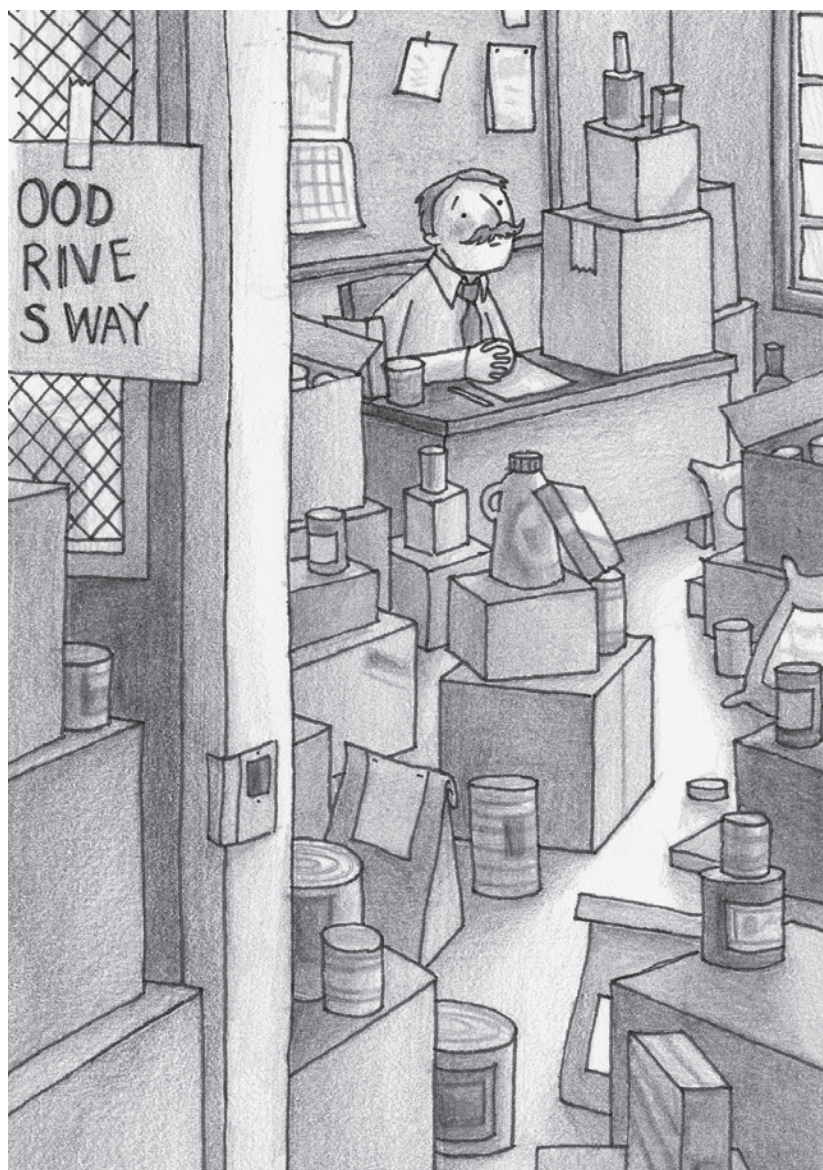
For one thing, Olivia was helping me out with my dancing whenever we got a chance. I wanted the movements to be perfect by the time the recital came around in May.

Plus, I was helping organize another food drive for the pantries. Our first one was a success. Kids brought in 4,700 cans of food. The pantries said all that food would make hundreds of meals for people who just couldn't afford groceries.

(Inside Story: There was such a mountain of food, it practically filled the principal's office. He could hardly get to his desk. But he said it was for a good cause and he didn't mind.)

The next food drive was going to be a contest. The class that brought in the most cans would get an extra recess for an entire week. So this time, we were hoping for even more food to feed the hungry in our community.





When the principal heard about the contest, he said he might have to move his desk into the hall during the food drive.



“One-and-two-and-three-and...” Olivia clapped as she counted to the beats in the music.

I looked in her long bedroom mirror. Stand on left leg. Knee straight. Right leg stretched back behind the body, toes pointed. Raise it in the air at an angle. Arms up, palms down. Upper back up (up, up, up, no falling forward).

“Whew, I feel like I’ve *finally* got it.” I flopped onto Olivia’s bed, exhausted but happy.

“Perfecto!” Olivia was beaming. “That *arabesque* was just right, Sydney. Bravo for our ballerina,” she cheered, raising both arms above her head and doing a victory dance.

(Inside Story: Practicing with Olivia was beginning to pay off. I was feeling more



comfortable and my movements didn't seem awkward anymore.)

My dancing was actually improving. Miss Julie had noticed it, too, and told me to keep up the good work. Maybe there was hope for an uncoordinated ballerina like me after all.

"Well, I better get to my math homework," Olivia said. "Arrrrrrgh! I just can't get the hang of it. But it has to click sooner or later," she said, tapping her brain and laughing, "... hopefully sooner."

"Good luck. By the way, my dad said he'll drive us tomorrow night," I told Olivia as I walked out of her bedroom door.

She yelled from her bedroom window as I skipped down the sidewalk, "Remember to have your mom and dad sign your permission slip—don't forget!"

Ah, yes. The permission slip. How *could* I forget? It was just about all I'd been thinking about since last week when Miss Julie announced the big surprise.



I had “forgotten” to bring it to jazz class on Wednesday. Then “forgotten” to bring it again to ballet class on Monday.

Working backstage on the fundraiser sounded exciting. But so did the last episode of “Stan, Stan The Magic Man.”

My mom and pop said that it was up to me to choose my priorities. But what was more important? If only I could be in two places at once.

Triple fiddlesticks!



Chapter Eight

MAKING THE GRADE

“Attention class,” said Miss Julie. “Thank you to all the dancers who have returned their permission slips. The following people have signed up as volunteers—Mary Lou, Rebecca, Danielle....” After she rattled off the list of volunteers, I turned to Olivia.

“Raise your hand,” I whispered, “she forgot to say your name.”

Olivia looked down quickly, then scrunched up her face. It was a bad news face. “Tell you later,” she whispered back, her face red all over.

Tell me *what* later? I got a sinking* feeling. I kept looking at Olivia during the practice, thinking I might get an inkling* about what was up with her. She broke the news after class.



“My mom said that I can’t volunteer for the fundraiser.”

“But...why?”

“Mr. Simms, our math teacher, called my mom yesterday. He said I might get a C in math if I don’t do better on the next two tests.”

“Oh, boy...”

“My mom said it’s time to concentrate on math and not add anything else to my schedule. I noticed that Miss Julie didn’t say your name. Did you turn in your permission slip?” Olivia glanced at the clock.

“Oops,” she said, sounding panicky, “I better scram*. We’re picking up my little brother and his karate class ends in five minutes. Talk to you tomorrow.”

My stomach went flip-flop. I had been maybe-kind-of-sorta leaning toward volunteering for the show. Flip. But I wanted to do it with Olivia. Flop. It would still be exciting and fun. Flip. But just not as exciting and fun without her. Flop.

Topsy-turvy*. That’s how I felt.



Chapter Nine
**THAT'S WHAT
FRIENDS ARE FOR**

“I would have told you before class, but I was too disappointed,” said Olivia during recess, “and most of all, embarrassed.”

“Embarrassed? Why?”

“Because math is so hard for me. Why can't I just get it like you do?”

“For the same reason that ballet is a breeze for you, but not for me.”

“You just needed someone to practice with, that's all.”

“And you just need someone to practice with, too. You're my ballet tutor. Now you have your own personal math tutor—me!”

Olivia thought for a second, then nodded once. “Deal.”



“So, do you think your mom will let you volunteer for the show if we promise to work on math after school and on Saturdays?”

“I’ll ask. Thanks, Sydney.”

“No problem. That’s what friends are for.”



Picking blueberries last summer in Maine was a fun day. I think I ate more than I picked. Lucky for us, my pop has what my mom calls “the fastest berry-picking fingers around.” Thanks to him, the most wonderful smell was wafting* from the kitchen as I opened the front door. It was irresistible.

“Have you given any more thought about being a volunteer for the show, Sydney?” asked my pop that night as he served us piping hot blueberry waffles.

“Still thinking,” I answered.

(Inside Story: Thursday is Breakfast-for-Dinner night at our house. This is always





followed by Dinner-for-Breakfast on Friday morning. Can you imagine? Veggie enchiladas* for *breakfast*?)

“What stars are performing this year?” asked my mom.

“Miss Julie said that Little Reggie and the Doo-Wops will open the show, singing a couple of golden oldies,” I said, “then Sisters Three on the Flying Trapeze, Carl Clive from Nashville singing his hit country song—”

“He’s so absolutely dreamy, so handsome and charming,” oohed and aaahed Sophia. “If you work backstage, you simply must get his autograph for me, darling little sister, who I drive to the mall and babysit and—”

“Wow, this is an all-star lineup*,” said my mom, interrupting Sophia’s dramatics.

“Then the Theatre of the Deaf* will do a performance, which Miss Julie said is fantastic, like a beautiful ballet of the hands,” I continued. “The actors are Deaf and



they will express the ideas of the play in American Sign Language*. There will also be voicing actors who will speak what the actors are signing*.

“After that comes a dance by my favorite ballerina, Anna Reese,” I said. “I heard she’s flying in especially for this show, then flying right out again after her performance, so I doubt she’ll have time to sign autographs.”

“Well, look on the bright side,” said Sophia, “Carl Clive loves to sign autographs and it just so happens I have a picture of him on my wall that you could take and get autographed.”

“And *get this*,” I said. “There’s a Mystery Guest Star whose identity is going to be kept Top Secret. Only the director of the show knows who it is.”

“I can’t wait to find out who it is,” said my mother.

“You and Pop are going?” I asked.



“Sure. We want to do our part to help the Children’s Hospital, too,” said my pop.

“And see the Mystery Guest,” said my mom.

“I wanted to go, too,” said my sister, “but the lead actress in the Franklin Angelo Theatre Company’s much-talked-about musical can’t be absent from a rehearsal, now can she?”



The next morning, as we walked to school, I noticed that Mary had a big smile on her face. *What’s she up to?* I wondered.

Bonnie noticed too. “Why are you smiling, Mary? We have a major Spanish quiz today, remember? Considering the grade you got on last week’s test, I’d think you might be wearing your Concerned Look today.”

“Nonsense,” she said. “It’s a *great* day, today. It’s an invite-your-friends-to-a-Stan-The-Man-party-day.” Her big smile turned into a humongous smile. She handed each of us a rolled yellow



paper tied with a green ribbon. “This is my sister’s party, but she said I could invite friends, too.”

We all unrolled them at once.

Stevie began reading his. “You’re invited to an “On-Top-of-Spaghetti-Party!”

David continued reading the invitation. “When? March 5th. Where? Mary’s House. What Time? One hour before Stan The Man crosses the Galooga Gorge on his unicycle.”

“Eat spaghetti, sing the theme song and have s’mores,” I read.

“Come have a blast and hope for the best—that Stan knows how to fix a flat tire on a tight-rope,” said David, laughing.

“Will there be apple cinnamon pancakes, too?” asked Stevie.

“Can you come?” asked Mary, ignoring Stevie’s question.

Everyone cheered “Yes!” at once. Everyone, that is, except me.

I had two choices. Two *fantastic* choices. Both on one night.



I felt like Stan must have felt, in the middle of the tightrope on a unicycle. A unicycle with a flat tire. Wobbling from side to side.



Chapter Ten

WISH UPON A STAR

“My wish is to be the President of the United States,” said Bonnie.

Ms. Frannie had given us another writing assignment that morning. The topic of our next 250-word essay was this: if we were given just one wish, what would it be and why.

“Mine is to be the first astronaut to plant a garden on Jupiter,” said Mary. “People will go crazy for Organic Outer Space Vegetables. Just imagine it. Raspberries for Out-of-This-World Jupiter Jam, pumpkins for Jupiter Jack-o’-Lanterns...”

“Did you know that nothing grows on Jupiter, Mary?” said David. “It’s mostly made of ice and gases. *And*, Jupiter has been surrounded by a giant storm like an enormous



hurricane for over 350 years. Plus, humans can't even *breathe* on Jupiter."

"Darn," Mary said. "Well, the moon then. Think of it...Moon Crater Sweet Carrots and Once In a Blue Moon Mango Shakes..."

"My wish," said Stevie, "is to bake a five-story cake that has cotton candy clouds around the top and a chocolate train that chugs in and out of red licorice tunnels and—"

"Not me," said David. "My wish is to get a front row seat at Stan's show where he tries to escape in 60 seconds from a triple-locked safe."

I threw my hands up in the air. "Think big, David! It's *your* wish."

"Huh?" he said.

"Why not wish to be Stan The Man's assistant?" I said. "Wouldn't you rather *be part* of a show, instead of *just watching* one?"

Right then, it hit me.

Wouldn't *I* rather be part of a show, instead of just watching one?



I ran as fast as I could into the library to tell Olivia. Thank goodness I had turned in my permission slip a few days ago, just in case.

“Olivia, Olivia,” I yelled.

Mrs. Russo, who had just celebrated her Golden Anniversary (that’s 50 years!) as Cedar Springs Elementary School’s librarian, stepped out from behind a tall shelf of books. If the stop sign she was making with her hand



hadn't put the brakes on my search for Olivia, her perfume sure would have. My pop says it's the same scent she wore when he went to Cedar Springs Elementary back when dinosaurs were still roaming the earth.

"Heavens to Betsy! What's the emergency here, Sydney Lee?" said Mrs. Russo.

A couple of weeks ago, she'd given me the OK to tutor Olivia in the library each morning before school. Now she looked sorry that she had said yes.

"My goodness, I thought we had an agreement about using our indoor voices in the library. Quiet is a must in a library," she scolded, "because people are trying to study."

I looked around. No people. In particular, not the person I was looking for.

"OK, Mrs. Russo, it won't happen again," I assured her.

"Very well then, Sydney Lee." She pursed her hot pink lips, smoothed her skirt and swiveled on her bright pink pumps.



I didn't need any more trouble, so I walked-ran down the hall to find Olivia.

(Inside Story: Running is strictly forbidden in the school hallways. But with a walk-run, by the time a teacher decides if it's more of a walk or more of a run, you're usually long gone.)

Into our homeroom. Through the gym.

That's funny, I thought, Olivia is nowhere to be found. I wondered if it had anything to do with the conference her mom was supposed to have yesterday with the math teacher to review her test scores. If her grades were up, she could volunteer that night for the show. If they weren't, she couldn't.

I headed out to the playground.

"Hey, Sydney, are you coming to the "On-Top-of-Spaghetti-Party tonight?" Mary asked.

I took a great big breath. Then another one. *Why was telling them so hard? What was I afraid of? Why did my ears feel like they were two hot flames?*

"Geez, thanks for the invitation, Mary," I said, "but...um...I'm going to volunteer for the 'Stars In Your Eyes' fundraiser."





“Now I *know* you’re crazy,” Bonnie said in disbelief.

“I wouldn’t miss seeing Stan go across the Galooga Gorge for anything!” shrieked David.

“Cuckoo-cuckoo,” said Mary, imitating a tiny bird that pokes its head out of a clock.

“But you *have* to come, Sydney,” Stevie pleaded. “Mary’s parents added apple cinnamon pancakes to the menu.”

David rolled his eyes at me. “You’re weird.”

This is why telling them was so hard, I thought miserably.

Christy shook her head and made a face like she’d just swallowed a bug.



This is exactly what I was afraid of,
I thought, holding back tears.

Mary pointed her index finger at her head
and did the crazy spiral.

Stevie stopped crunching his granola bar.

They looked at me like I was speaking a
different language.

Then they went back to playing tag like
I wasn't even there. Like I was invisible.

So I went back to trying to find Olivia.

Which I did. In the principal's office.
Standing beside her mother and another woman
(a *real* math tutor, maybe?).

Things didn't look good. I couldn't
understand it—Olivia had been studying so
hard and really seemed to be getting the hang
of math.

I was just about to open the door to the
reception area when the school bell rang.
Uh-oh. I turned and I walked-ran to class.

Oh fiddlesticks!



Chapter Eleven

THERE'S NO BUSINESS LIKE SHOW BUSINESS

“Look on the bright side, Sydney,” said Sophia, after I told her what had happened. “Now you don’t have to sing about somebody sneezing on a meatball. Yuk!”

“Any word on who the Mystery Guest Star is?” asked my mom hopefully.

“Nope, it’s still Top Secret,” I said.

“Well, we better get going,” said my pop, “we’re going to drop you off at the Majesty Theatre. Then your mom and I are going out to dinner until it’s time for the show.”

“Unfair,” cried Sophia dramatically. “Not a speck of food for your hungry daughter who’s worked the day away at school? Your loved one



who will sing her heart out tonight rehearsing for the Franklin Angelo Theatre Company's upcoming show?"

"Leftovers are in the fridge, my loved one," said my mom, giving my sister a hug goodbye.



It nearly took my breath away to be on the stage of the Majesty Theatre.

Thousands of empty chairs faced us, as Miss Julie and our class stood on the stage with Mrs. Busby, the director. Bright white and colorful lights beamed overhead in every direction. The orchestra section was in front of us on a lower level.

So many great actors, dancers, singers, musicians and entertainers had stood in the exact same spot where I was now standing.

I just wished Olivia could be there, too. My throat felt all tight. Tears brimmed in my eyes. To think that Olivia had been studying for weeks to be able to volunteer at the show.



She deserved to be here. Maybe if we had studied just a little bit more...

“Does anyone have any questions so far?” asked Mrs. Busby. She looked at Miss Julie and all around. No hands went up.

“Fine, then let me give you a tour of where all the behind-the-scenes action takes place. I know you’ve been waiting to see the performers’ dressing rooms, so let’s exit Stage Left. Then I’ll give you assignments for this evening’s show.”

(Inside Story: The way my sister the actress explained it to me, when you’re describing left and right in a theatre, Stage Left refers to an actresses’ left side when she is standing on the stage facing the audience.)

It sure was dark going through Stage Left. Someone touched my shoulder. *Gulp!* I whirled around, surprised and startled.

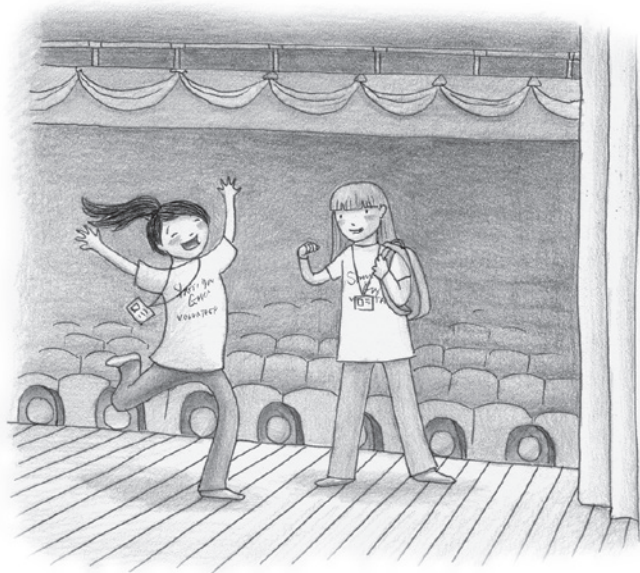
Yes! I jumped up and down, this time surprised and happy.

“Hi, Sydney, what did I miss?” Olivia



whispered, panting from running to catch up with our group.

“Where have you...I saw you...I thought that...” A dozen questions raced through my mind as I tried to piece the story together.



“Thanks to my own personal tutor, I *aced* my exams. Not one B+, but two!” she exclaimed.

“Perfecto,” I said, raising both arms above my head and doing a victory dance. “Bravo for our math whiz.”



“My great-aunt Millie flew in from Miami for the show as a surprise, so my mom brought us to the school so I could give her a tour,” she whispered as we followed the director down the steps.

“My mom has always said that my great-aunt could charm bees right out of the hive,” Olivia said giggling. “Now I know why. She convinced my mom that we should play hooky and go play miniature golf.”



What luck! Olivia and I got assigned to be backstage with Miss Julie. She’d been preparing for the show with the director and knew all the details.

“Sydney, I’ll call on you for help as needed,” said Miss Julie, “so stay close by.”

“Olivia,” said Miss Julie, “I saw you communicating in American Sign Language with your cousin when she visited the dance studio.



Would you like to work with the interpreters* and the Theatre of the Deaf to make sure they have everything they need before, during and after the show?”

Olivia’s eyes were shining. “Sure, Miss Julie!” she said. And then whispered to me, “Wow! Wait till I tell my cousin, Annie!”

“Good,” said Miss Julie. “First, let me introduce you to Therese, the sign language interpreter for this evening’s performance. She’s on the planning committee, so she can fill you in on what needs to be done before the actors and interpreters arrive.”

We listened as Therese explained the ins-and-outs of the performance.

“This show is an interpreted performance, which means that for musical and some other acts, there will be a sign language interpreter—that’s me—who will sign for the Deaf audience,” Therese said. “I’ll stand just a little off to the side of the performers so people can watch both the performers and me without too much difficulty.



It's important that the audience can see my hands and the expression on my face.

"It's a little different during the ballet. I'll be just slightly off to the side of the stage, standing like this," Therese said, facing where Anna Reese would be dancing. "That's how I'll let the audience know that I won't be signing during that part of the show.

"When the Theatre of the Deaf performs, they'll express the ideas in the play in American Sign Language. There will also be voicing actors who will speak what the Deaf actors are signing.

"The Theatre actors should be arriving any minute," said Therese. "Would you like to meet them, Olivia?"

Olivia was beaming from ear to ear.



I could hear the hum of the audience trying to find their seats. I peeked from behind the curtain. A full house. Thousands of people.



The orchestra began to play. The lights went down and the curtain went up. The announcer thanked everyone who had come to see the show—and all the entertainers, including the Mystery Guest Star—who came to support the Children’s Hospital.

The announcer continued, “And now, ladies and gentlemen, I’m pleased to introduce our first act of the evening, Little Reggie and the Doo-Wops...”

The audience went wild clapping.

“Sydney, I’ve just received word,” said Miss Julie, “that water bottles are needed in the dressing room marked MGS. Can you please bring those down?”

I really wanted to see Little Reggie and the Doo-Wops perform, but duty called. Off I went down the hall with water bottles in hand.

There, live and in person, was ballerina Anna Reese. Right smack dab in front of me. She was every bit as elegant as she looks onstage.



“Oh honey, just what I need,” she said, looking at the water. “May I?”

As she reached for one of the bottles, she looked at my volunteer tag. “You’re from Miss Julie’s School of Dance? *Wonderful*. Julie and I have been friends since we started dancing together in first grade. In fact, she’s the one who helped me get the *arabesque* right.”

She looked up in the air, as if remembering something from a long time ago, and sighed happily. Taking a sip of water, she looked at the surprised expression on my face and smiled.



“Are you surprised?” She threw her head back and laughed. “Just because I’m a famous ballerina doesn’t mean dancing comes just like that,” she said, snapping her fingers once. “I’ve had to work extra hard on some steps, too... just like everyone else.”

With the gentle touch of a ballerina, she put her hand on my shoulder. “Pay attention to Miss Julie and reach for the stars.” With that, she glided into her dressing room.

And I glided down the hall to the MGS dressing room, like I was walking on air. *Did that really happen, I thought, or was it the best dream I’ve ever had?*



Chapter Twelve

MYSTERY SOLVED

Funny, I didn't remember going into the MGS dressing room on the tour with the director. We had definitely passed by that one. I was sure of it.

I knocked. No answer. I knocked a little louder. Still no answer. I kno—

“Cmm en, cmm en...” said a guy who opened the door, his mouth full of toothpaste. “Fanks, fanks oulot.” He took the water bottles into the bathroom.

Hey, I thought, this guy looks familiar. I put on my thinking cap. Who does he remind me of?

My job was done. I had delivered the bottles. Should I leave now? I shifted from one foot to the other. I looked around the room, then at the door. MGS. Wait, MGS? Mystery Guest Star?



Oh my gosh, I was in the Mystery Guest Star's dressing room. Holy mackerel.

He came out of the bathroom, smiling, his teeth sparkling white. A glittery blue top hat shimmered on his head.

Wait a second. *I know who this guy looks like*, I thought.

But he didn't just *look* like Stan The Man. He *was* Stan The Man.



“Thanks for the water,” said Stan. “I wanted to brush my teeth before I went onstage, but the water from the faucet tastes funny.”

He kept talking, which was a good thing, because I was speechless.

“I’m in a pickle,” he said.

Stan in a pickle? I couldn’t imagine it.

“My assistant, Wanda, was supposed to fly out here with me today, but she got the flu. The thing is, she brings a couple of important props onto the stage in between magic tricks. It spoils the suspense if the props are already on the stage. So I was wondering...do you think you could do me a favor? Could you bring out the props tonight?”

I nodded, still unable to speak.

“Terrific,” Stan The Man said. “I’ll talk you through it right now.”



When I walked onstage to give Stan The Man a fake five-foot-tall ear of corn and a



huge set of false teeth that night, I could hardly believe it was me. Onstage. Helping Stan.

As I headed backstage, I glanced into the audience, hoping to see my mom and pop. No luck. That was OK. I knew they saw me.

When I rolled a big glittery gold box onstage for Stan a little later, I stole a quick look into the audience again. How my eyes went straight to Bonnie, I'll never know. But there she was, sitting next to her parents.

Bonnie's smile was just about as big as the Galooga Gorge. Her expression told me that I wasn't invisible after all—or weird.



At the end of the show, the whole cast went onstage to take a bow. Stan whisked me out there in front of him. The roar of the crowd clapping and whistling filled the theatre.

“Thanks a million for filling in for Wanda,” Stan said.

Newspaper reporters snapped photos of all of us.

Flash! Flash! Flash-Flash!

There I was sitting on top of the world. There was magic in the air. There were stars in my eyes.



Glossary

*Many words have more than one meaning. Here are the definitions of words marked with this symbol * (an asterisk) as they are used in sentences.*

aced: *having done something
as well as an expert would*

American Sign Language: *a language using
hand shapes, body movements and
facial movements to communicate*

annual: *happening once every year*

ASAP: *As Soon As Possible*

audition: *a short performance by an actor,
actress, singer, dancer or musician that's
a test to get a job*

brewing: *starting to develop or form*

choreographing: *creating the steps or
movements for a dance routine*

Deaf: *without hearing*

dire: *very serious, terrible and needing
attention right away*



dramatic: *expressing an idea or feeling
in an interesting or exciting way*

enchiladas: *rolled tortillas with filling inside*

feats: *remarkable acts that show skill,
courage or strength*

fitting: *trying on clothes or a costume to see
if it fits, needs to be made smaller or bigger*

flair: *a special talent*

fundraiser: *an event to raise money for a
good cause*

ginormously: *enormously*

glory: *great beauty or magnificence*

gorge: *a valley between cliffs*

hair-raising: *extremely frightening or alarming*

haywire: *out of control, in confusion*

hesitated: *paused before doing something*

inkling: *a hint*

insatiable: *impossible to satisfy*

interpreters: *people who put words and
meanings from one language into the
words and meanings of another language*

jig: *a lively dance with leaps*



kaput: *broken and no longer working*
lineup: *a group of people brought together
for a performance*
literature: *books and writing*
nanosecond: *one billionth of a second*
negotiating: *talking over a problem to reach
an agreement*
numb: *without feeling*
one-track mind: *thinking very much
about one interest*
ovation: *enthusiastic clapping by an audience*
peck: *one-quarter of a bushel basket*
play-by-play: *a description of
every detail of an event*
pled: *asked in a serious way*
potluck: *a party where each guest or
family brings food to share*
priority: *something that is thought to be
more important than another thing*
queasy: *feeling uncomfortable, sick,
nervous and worried*
scram: *to go away in a hurry*



senior citizens: *elderly people*
sign, signing: *using the hand shapes,
body movements and facial
movements of American Sign
Language to communicate*
sinking: *an unpleasant feeling that
something not good has happened
or is about to happen*
soup kitchen: *a place where food is served
for free to homeless or poor people*
spur-of-the-moment: *done quickly,
without planning*
standing ovation: *when an audience stands
at the end of a performance and claps*
stunt: *an action showing great skill and courage*
sulked: *showed a bad mood*
toiled: *worked hard*
topsy-turvy: *feeling of confusion*
tradition: *an event that has been done for a
long time and becomes the usual thing to do*
trauma: *a disturbing experience*
VIP: *Very Important Person*



wafting: *carrying through the air*

widgets: *clever tools that might not have names*

World Series: *annual series of baseball games
between the winning teams in the two
major leagues to decide a championship*



Amaze your friends...
Dazzle your family...
Stan The Man
shows you how with this

**Unstoppable,
Unpoppable
Balloon Trick**
that works like magic!



With a wave of your magic wand,
you can command a balloon not to pop—
not even when sticking it with a pin!

What you'll need:

*Clear tape, a pin and 3 to 5 blown-up balloons
in different colors*

Here's how it works:

Stan says that the secret to this magic trick
is putting a piece of clear tape about the size of a
quarter on the round end of all of the balloons.
Smooth down the tape's corners and edges
so the tape is invisible to the audience.



You'll want to practice this a few times before your performance, then let the magic begin:

1. Explain your magic powers to the audience. Ask the audience which balloon color they want.
2. Hold your balloon just like Stan is in the picture, so the pin will prick the spot where the tape is.
3. Wave your wand over that balloon and say, *Abracadabra, shoobedoobop, even with a pin, this balloon won't pop!*
4. Slowly push the pin into the balloon and remove it slowly. *It won't pop!*
5. Now tell the audience you're going to remove your magical powers.
6. Wave your wand over the same balloon and say, *Abracadabra, shoobedoobop, now it's time to make this magic stop!*
7. This time push the pin slowly into a spot that's close to the end, but not where the tape is. *Pop!*
8. Ta-da! Now take a bow. (And remember, magicians don't tell their secrets.)





About the Author

Susan Cappadonia Love has written about candy bars, boomerangs, painters and pyramids. She's penned stories about samurai, arithmetic and amazing animal athletes (did you know that a goliath frog can jump nine feet in one leap?). But one of her favorite things having to do with words is reading to her kids at night. Because they can travel around the world, explore real or imaginary places, and get to know people they might not have met. And the best part is—they can do it in their pajamas! The other favorite thing was writing this book (which she also sometimes did in her pajamas, but that's just between us).

*In addition to **Stars in Your Eyes**, Ms. Love has written **One Smart Cookie**, a tale about finding good fortune in unexpected ways.*

She lives in Massachusetts with her husband, Scott, and their two super-duper daughters who go by the names of Sofa Loveseat and Peachie-Pie (but you can call them Sophie and Olivia if you'd prefer).





this is OUR story®

Stars in Your Eyes

"Stan, Stan The Magic Man" is the best TV show on the planet. And it's what all the fourth graders in Sydney Lee's class are talking about. Stan The Man will be attempting his most dangerous stunt yet—cooking pancakes while balancing on a tightrope over the Galooga Gorge. Will he be able to pull it off? Everyone who's anyone at Cedar Springs Elementary School will be watching to find out. Everyone, that is, except Sydney Lee™. Just as Stan's about to begin this hair-raising high-wire act, Sydney Lee's TV goes kaput. Then things go from bad to worse.

Her mom and dad decide to try a family experiment—weeknights will be a TV-free zone at Sydney Lee's house. Her classmates are beginning to think she's weird. Plus, she's five steps behind everyone else in ballet class. Then along comes a big decision that only Sydney Lee can make—to follow along with her friends or to follow her dreams. And what she wants to know is this:
"Is there hope for a ballerina like me...and is there life after TV?"

It's impossible to separate Our Generation® characters from the generation of girls who read about and play with them, for they are one and the same. They're changing the world by making their households greener. They're baking cupcakes to help charities. They're writing in their journals, practicing for recitals, doing cartwheels down the block and giggling with their friends until they can hardly breathe. Our Generation is about girls growing up together. "This is our story" reflects the community of these amazing girls as they laugh, learn and create the narrative of their own generation.

Ages 7 and up

Maison Battat Inc. Publisher

Cover art © 2009 by Kristi Valiant

Story Illustrations © 2007 by Kelly Murphy

Cover © 2009, 2011 by

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www.ogdolls.com

ISBN: 978-0-9794542-2-6



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