



A Fair Share at the Diner

FEATURING ISA & NOA™

BY ERIKA NADINE WHITE
ILLUSTRATED BY GÉRALDINE CHARETTE





our
generation®

This is Isa's and Noa's story.



ISA AND NOA™

A FAIR SHARE AT THE DINER

BY

ERIKA NADINE WHITE

ILLUSTRATED BY GÉRALDINE CHARETTE

An Our Generation® book

MAISON JOSEPH BATTAT LTD. *Publisher*

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wonderful, wise, generous
Aunty Elizabeth, with love*

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EXTRA! EXTRA! READ ALL ABOUT IT!

*Big words, wacky words, powerful words, funny words...
what do they all mean? They are marked with this symbol *.
Look them up in the Glossary at the end of this book.*





Chapter One

WHAT'S COOKING

The school bus dropped Noa and me off at the crosswalk by the Bite to Eat diner.

“Have an ice cream soda for me!” said Betty, our driver, as she opened the door.

“Don’t worry, we will!” Noa grinned. Betty watched us as we crossed the street. When we reached the sidewalk we turned and waved. A bunch of our classmates waved back as the bus pulled away.

Little chimes tinkled as we opened the door and stepped inside. Noa’s family owns the diner and her dad, Bob, does all the cooking. I’ve known the whole family ever since I was a baby, because Bob is my father’s oldest friend. They even went to college together!

“Hello,” called Noa’s mom, Louise, as we



came through the door.

“What’s up, hep cats?” grinned Noa’s Aunt Jackie. She always talks like that.

A couple of regulars*, Gladys and Alice, were having coffee and cake. “Look at the size of you girls!” said Alice, “I swear you’ve both grown an inch since the last time I saw you!”

“Last week?” Gladys shook her head and joked, “They’re girls, not dandelions, Alice!”

“Do you have homework?” asked Louise.

“Are you hungry?” Jackie wondered.

“Yes, and yes!” we agreed.

Jackie started making us an after school snack.

“What’ll it be, girls?”

“We promised Betty we’d have an ice cream soda!” piped up Noa.

Jackie laughed, “Never break a promise! Isa-Noa Betta Soda?”

“Please!” we chorused*.

Louise, busy at the cash register, glanced at our homework and gave us each a hug. “Let me know when you’re done. I’ll check it for you,” she told us.



Louise does all of the accounting* for the diner, so she's a big help with math!



The diner has cool retro decor* from the 1950s. The floor has pink and black tiles. You can sit on a swirly stool at the counter, or in a funky booth. There's even a jukebox! Louise and Jackie are super into everything fifties—music, clothes, you name it. Louise sings crazy songs like 'Be Bop a Lula' while she cuts cakes or mops the floor. Jackie uses funny slang from the 'nifty fifties' like 'My heels are on fire!' (which means she's really busy), or 'It's antsville in here!' (meaning the diner is super crowded).

It's always hopping around here. For breakfast Bite to Eat serves all the usuals and a lot of coffee. I love the smell of coffee brewing but I tried a sip once and it tasted terrible! I can't imagine why anyone wouldn't rather have a hot chocolate!

For lunch there's soup, sandwiches, hamburgers, hot dogs, french fries, plus whatever is the special* that day. For dessert? Banana splits,



cookies, cakes, pies, pastries, doughnuts, you name it! The most popular item on the menu, though, is Bob's special homemade pizzas. They are the tastiest!

Jackie says I know the menu so well I'm ready to be an apprentice* waitress. She even made Noa and me little aprons that look just like the ones she and Louise wear.



Jackie made us our favorite ice cream soda: fresh orange juice, sparkling water, one scoop of vanilla and two straws. We invented it ourselves and now it's on the menu! 'Isa-Noa Betta Soda' is an old family joke. My father used to look at us playing together when we were tiny and say, "Ahh, Isa-Noa betta babies!" Of course we don't remember that, but we like the way our two names make a funny pun* together!

I guess one reason both Noa and I love inventing new treats is that my father's company is a restaurant food supply service*. He supplies



the diner, so we're all in the food business together. Sometimes, if he wants to test a new product, he gives a sample to Bob to cook. Then we all taste it over dinner. The results are usually delicious!

We all enjoy new foods and flavors except for my little brother, Matias, who's only three. He's a pretty fussy eater, or, like my father says, a 'harsh critic'*. Once we gave him a piece of spinach quiche*. He made the most awful face, held his nose, and called it 'No thank you pie!' On the other hand, when Matias does like a new recipe we know for sure other people will too.



We shared our snack while we did our homework. Sitting with my best friend in one of my favorite places, two pages of math problems and even the dreaded vocabulary list went by in no time flat*. I love learning new words and their meanings, but sometimes I have a hard time remembering how to spell them. Noa is the other way around. She can spell just about anything, but she doesn't always





remember the definition.

While we were working, a few people dropped in to have a quick cup of coffee and a chat or to pick up some take-out, but mostly we had the place to ourselves. Louise checked our math questions for us when we were done. I only had to make two corrections.

By the time we were packing up our homework Jackie had wiped down all the counters and Louise was closing the cash*. Bob was baking something in the back and it was starting to smell really good.

My mother was out making her usual delivery run for the local food bank* and pretty soon she was going to pick me up on her way home.

“Goodnight, dandelions!” called Alice as she, Gladys, and a man who stopped in to pick up a pizza headed out the door

“Goodnight! See you soon!” we answered together.

As I put away my math books I noticed my mouth was beginning to water. What was Bob baking? I sure hoped I would get a chance to find out!





Chapter Two

A BOSS JOB

Isa's mother, Lorraina, came into the diner just as Aunt Jackie asked me to flip the sign on the door from OPEN to CLOSED. It was exactly five o'clock. I held the door open for Lorraina. She was carrying Isa's little brother Matias, who had fallen asleep on the way over. He looked really cute with his hair all messy and his mouth open wide in a yawn. He wasn't quite awake yet.

My mom and Aunt Jackie smiled and put their fingers to their lips to say, 'Shush!'

We all talked quietly while Lorraina snuggled Matias up next to Isa in the booth and then stepped into the kitchen to speak with my dad about this new kind of pepperoni we've been getting. While they were in there I crossed my fingers. An amazing smell was drifting through the diner,



and I wondered if there might be a new recipe to try tonight. I love pepperoni. I wondered if that was what was cooking.

Sure enough, just a few minutes later Dad invited Isa's whole family to the diner for dinner. He said he had baked something special he wanted us all to try.

"Well, I don't want to put you out," Lorraina was saying as they came out of the kitchen.

"Don't be silly!" cried my dad. "You've been busy all day, you don't have time to cook. We have enough here to feed eight people and still have leftovers! We've got chili, my special surprise, and enough greens for a giant salad. What are we going to do with all this food if you don't join us?"

"Well, okay, if you're really sure. That sounds great, and it smells even better!" Lorraina grinned as she sniffed the mouthwatering aroma* which seemed to be getting stronger and stronger. She turned to us.

"Girls, can I rely on you to watch Matias while I go and pick up Carlos at the office?" She



glanced at her watch. “It shouldn’t take me more than fifteen minutes.”

“We don’t mind,” Isa and I chorused at once.

“It’s perfect!” Dad clapped his hands and smiled. “Everything will be ready right on time.”



Matias was finally waking up and getting fidgety, so we got out a coloring book and some crayons that Mom keeps behind the counter for little kids. The purple was missing and the brown was broken but Matias didn’t seem to care. He really loves trucks, cars, and trains, so I found a page with a picture of a train and showed it to him.

“Choo-choo!” he said to me, grabbing a crayon.

“Choo-choo!” I agreed, watching him work.

Jackie came over to the table and handed us our matching aprons.

“Okay, girls. You’re on duty!” She sat down with Matias and picked up a crayon. Grin-



ning, Isa and I ran to the counter and started counting out the cutlery. When the diner is closed and it's just Isa's family and mine, we get to help out, and we love it! The aprons Aunt Jackie sewed for us make it easy to pretend we're real waitresses running our own diner. Still, it's good to know our customers are really just our parents or my aunt or Isa's little brother, because sometimes we make mistakes, like putting the fork on the right side of the placemat instead of the left, or forgetting the napkins. Once I spilled a whole soda on Carlos, but he just laughed and said it was a good thing the boss (that's my Dad!) could never fire me, because Isa and I are his favorite waitresses.

We set five places at the counter with placemats, napkins, cutlery, and glasses. Then we set three places at the booth for Matias, Isa, and me. There isn't a big enough table for both families to sit together, so the kids always get the booth while the grownups sit at the counter.

The aroma drifting out of the kitchen had changed; it was even better since the food smelled



ready. I heard a little ‘ping’ as the oven timer went off. Whatever my dad was baking, it was done. I wanted some so badly my stomach started to grumble.

Aunt Jackie grinned at me. “Sounds like you’ve worked up an appetite!” She stood up from the booth where she’d been drawing with Matias and took a look at our place settings.

“You girls did a boss job!” That’s fifties slang for amazing.

“How about some sounds while I toss the greens?” Jackie pulled a big bowl from under the counter to make a salad. By ‘sounds’ she meant music, so I flipped through the jukebox while Isa helped Matias put his crayons away. Naturally, because of Mom and Aunt Jackie, the jukebox is mostly stacked with the top hits of the fifties. I put on one of Mom’s favorite songs, called ‘Bye-Bye Love’. The words sound really sad but the tune is sort of happy. Mom stirred the chili, singing along. Jackie joined in. They sound really good when they sing together. Isa and I started dancing



around and Matias began to giggle.

Just then, Lorraina and Carlos came through the door. Carlos began to laugh as he took in the scene.

“My favorite diner!” he cried as Matias flew into his arms for a hug, “with all my favorite people in it!”

Suddenly my dad was standing in the kitchen door, a tray stacked with steaming hot empanadas* in his hands. “Mesdames et Messieurs,*” he announced in a goofy voice, “dinner is served!”







Chapter Three

THE MORE WE SHARE THE MORE WE HAVE

My eyes grew wide and my mouth started to water when I saw the tray of empanadas Bob had made for us.

I love good food — not just eating it, but cooking and sharing it, too. When I grow up maybe I'll become a TV chef, or open a pastry shop, or write cookbooks! When Noa and I invent something new, I always write down the recipe (in fact, there's a very special recipe at the back of this book!). Or maybe I'll be a restaurant critic*! Once, my mother showed me an article from the newspaper that listed the ten best places to get fresh seafood in North America. Most of them were near the ocean. The writer probably got to travel around eating in fancy restaurants all over the place! I think that would be a pretty good job for me.





I love empanadas, but these ones were extra-specially amazing. The outsides were made of crispy dough baked to a golden brown and the insides were bursting with flavor. As we sat down to eat, Bob explained that he'd mixed thin slices of the new pepperoni with cheese and arugula*.

As we began our meal it became very quiet. We were too busy enjoying the food to talk. By the time Jackie offered everyone a second helping, we all agreed the empanadas should be on the new menu. As Louise was saying how delicious the crust was, I noticed my little brother picking the arugula out of his empanada and hiding it under a napkin. Noa saw too and we smiled at each other, but we didn't say a word. I hadn't liked arugula when I was little either.



By the end of the meal we'd eaten the whole tray of empanadas and most of the salad, but there was still lots of chili left over.

"Don't worry," said my father, "I'll take it



to the office tomorrow for lunch. It'll disappear pretty quickly!" He brings a treat from the Bite to Eat to his office all the time, whether it's a cake to celebrate a secretary's birthday or a few pizzas for people working late.

"Great idea," said Bob. "I wish I could give all of our leftover food to someone who would appreciate it!"

"Give it to us, Daddy! We appreciate it!" piped up Noa.

Bob smiled, shaking his head. "I know you do, muffin. But what are you going to do with two dozen eggs, five ripe avocados and six loaves of bread?"

"Huh?" said Noa.

"That's what I've got left over in the kitchen today. I ordered too many eggs. I thought breakfasts would be busier this week. I could freeze the bread, but you can't make sandwiches with yesterday's bread, or overripe avocados. Too much food ends up going to waste!"

My mother cleared her throat. She looked



a little bit embarrassed. “Um, Bob? If you really mean it about wanting to give the food to someone who will appreciate it, I could speak to my supervisor at the food bank about taking donations from the diner.”

My mother has been volunteering at the food bank for ages. She picks up donations of food from all over town in her car and then delivers it to the volunteer centre, which is also a soup kitchen*.

Bob stared at my mother as though she were some kind of a genius. “That’s a wonderful idea!” Bob said. “Do you really think we could do that?”

My mother smiled, “I’ll speak to my supervisor tomorrow and see what she says, but I think she’ll be very pleased with the idea.”

“Can we help too?” asked Noa, looking at me and then at our parents.

“Yes!” I chimed in, “we could sort out the leftovers and pack the food!”

“Well,” Bob said, “that could be a big job. You girls are already so busy with homework and soccer... let’s just wait and see.” Our faces fell.



Noa and I knew what that meant. Most of the time ‘wait and see’ turns out to be ‘no’.

Jackie came to our rescue. “I don’t mind organizing the food and helping the girls pack. Lorraina, which days do you usually deliver food to the soup kitchen?”

“Wednesdays and Fridays,” my mother told Jackie.

“Well,” said Jackie, “we’ll get the food ready and the girls can help you deliver it.”

“That would be a big help!” exclaimed my mother. “It’s so hard to keep an eye on Matias as it is, and if I have even more food to deliver I will need some assistants.”

“Well, if your supervisor okays it I guess we can give it a try,” Bob agreed. Noa and I just beamed. So did my mother.



Matias was starting to look sleepy and we were all feeling full. Noa and I began clearing the cutlery and the dishes, Louise loaded the



dishwasher, and Jackie tidied up the counter. When we were done helping with clean-up we hung our aprons on the hook behind the kitchen door, ready for next time. Bob and my father were still talking about the pepperoni empanadas as my mother and I found our jackets and got Matias ready for the ride home.

As we all said goodnight, Bob was nodding happily and so was my father. I was pretty excited about my mother's idea, especially if it meant we could help too. I whispered to Noa, "It will be more like working at the diner than ever!"





Chapter Four

SPECIAL DELIVERY

A week later Isa and I were practically bursting with excitement as our school bus pulled up in front of the diner.

“Going to have an ice cream soda for me today?” asked Betty.

“Sorry,” answered Isa, “we won’t have time for sodas today! We’re going to be delivering food to the soup kitchen!”

“Really?” our driver sounded impressed. “That sounds pretty important! Good for you, girls!”

“Thanks,” we both said as we got off the bus. I couldn’t wait to get started.



Inside the diner my mom was waiting on a



couple of teenagers who were sitting in the booth where Isa and I usually like to do our homework. The girl was sipping on a strawberry ice cream soda that matched her pink sweater and the boy was eating a huge banana split. Mom was showing them how to work the jukebox. She gave us a wink and a wave.

Isa and I hung up our jackets and schoolbags and slipped quietly into the kitchen.

Jackie was taping up a big box to put the food in while Dad was taking a tray of the new pepperoni empanadas out of the oven.

“These are selling like hot cakes*!” he told us. “I have two dozen on order for this afternoon alone!”

“That’s great, Dad!” I sniffed the air, “It sure smells good in here!”

Aunt Jackie turned to Isa and me with a big smile. “I’ve got things all set up for you on the counter, girls.” We put on our aprons and washed our hands so we could get to work. First we took a huge tub of potato salad and scooped it into



travel containers. Jackie poured minestrone soup* into four big thermos bottles. Isa and I put dozens of dinner rolls and loaves of sliced rye bread into plastic bags and closed them with twist ties to keep everything fresh. Then we filled up the box with cucumbers, tomatoes, baby spinach, and a jar of my dad's amazing lemon-honey salad dressing. I smiled to myself. Dad seemed to have a lot more 'leftovers' than usual. He must have made too much soup on purpose.

Isa's mother came to pick us up just as we finished packing. We carried the food out to the car. Isa and I squeezed in next to Matias in his car seat, and we were off.



A man with bright red curly hair met us at the door of the food bank. Lorraina introduced him as Jack and thanked him for being there to give us a hand. He led the way as we carried the boxes into a huge kitchen. Isa and I were carrying the one full of vegetables and bread between us.



It wasn't very heavy but it was big and awkward. Jack had the heavy one, which included the four big containers of soup, but he acted like it was practically nothing.

“Hey everybody!” cried Jack, “this is Lorraina’s daughter Isa and her best friend Noa. They’re bringing us food from the Bite to Eat today, and I hear if we’re really nice they might start doing it regularly!”

Everybody smiled at us, said hello, and introduced themselves, but I knew I would have a hard time remembering all their names. I was too busy looking around me in amazement.

The stove had eight burners and two ovens. Two huge fridges and a freezer took up one end of the room. Tall cupboards lined the other walls. A central island* with a wooden top was surrounded by busy volunteers. There were people making sandwiches, someone stirring a huge pot on the stove, and others sorting or storing canned food in cupboards with shelves so high they used a stepladder to get up and down.





Before we left Jack showed us the dining hall. It looked sort of like our cafeteria at school. Long tables filled the room, some lined with benches and others with chairs. Other people were in here, setting each place at the tables with a napkin, cutlery and a cup. Neat pairs of salt and pepper shakers dotted the center, between the place settings. The afternoon light coming from the tall windows on one wall made it look welcoming and nice. Jack said in an hour it would be full of people happy to have a bowl of the minestrone soup we had brought.



In the car on the way back I asked Lorraina about a million questions. Why were there so many volunteers in the kitchen? How many people were they feeding every day? Why were there so many people who needed food?

Lorraina laughed and asked me to slow down. “I can’t answer all of those questions,” she said. “The kitchen is a community kitchen, where



lots of volunteers get together to make food for people who need it. Some of the food they make goes to people who need help at home and some of it is served to people who come to the soup kitchen, that big dining room Jack showed us. The food bank provides groceries for the people who can't afford them."

"Wow! That's a lot of work!" I said.

"Yes, but it's one way of trying to make sure everyone in our community has enough to eat," Lorraina told us. "I'm really happy you both wanted to pitch in!"

Isa and I are pretty lucky: we both have families who really love good food, and we all have more than enough to eat, but thinking of that made me feel sad for all the people who don't. I felt really good about donating the food from the diner, but I wondered what else we could do. "Maybe the Bite to Eat could do more to help the soup kitchen," I mused.

"I know, we could start a community kitchen at the diner, but make it like a party!" exclaimed



Isa.

“Hmm,” said Lorraina, “That sounds interesting. We’ll have to see what Bob and Louise say.”

“We could do it on a Sunday, when we’re closed anyway!” I exclaimed. “We’ll invite all of our friends and cook up a ton of food! We can play fifties music! My mom and Aunt Jackie will love that idea.”

“Yes!” chimed in Isa. “A celebration to match the location!”





Chapter Five

RECIPE FOR FANTASTIC

When we got back to the diner Noa and I were still talking about our great idea. Jackie and Louise were listening, but Bob looked worried.

“It’s a really nice idea, girls. I’d love to do something to help. But I just don’t see how we have the space!”

“It can be a mini community kitchen, Dad!” begged Noa.

“I don’t know,” said Bob, shaking his head. “We’ll see.” Noa and I looked at each other in dismay*. Not a ‘We’ll see’!

Then we had to pick my father up at his office, so that was that.

Even though we’d had a great day, I felt sad as I got ready for bed that night. I had been imagining the party so clearly, I felt like it just had



to happen!



That Friday after school, when we arrived at the diner, my mother was already there.

“Sit down, girls!” said Bob. “We have to talk!”

Wondering what was going on, Noa and I slid into our favorite booth.

“We’ve been discussing your idea,” my mother began. “Bob is right, the diner is too small for a community kitchen. What about a fundraising party, instead?”

“What’s that?” I asked.

“We hold a party, and we donate all of our profits* to the food bank,” she answered.

Everyone was waiting to hear our reaction. Noa and I looked at each other and then nodded happily.

“We’re going to throw the best shindig* ever!” cried Jackie.

“Hurray!” said Noa and I.



“Nothing like a compromise!” said Louise.



Over the next few weeks we had lots of family meetings sorting out the details. The meetings were fun because they almost always involved a yummy meal or snack, plus lots of great ideas from everyone. There was so much to think about.

Finally it was all decided. Jackie and Louise were going to organize the music. My mother was going to help out with waiting tables. Bob would cook, of course. My father would be donating loads of food!

My mother designed a flyer to advertise the party, with a picture of the diner on the front. Besides giving the date and time it explained we were raising money for the food bank, so people should bring a hearty appetite for helping out and having fun, as well as canned goods to donate.

Noa and I spent most of one Sunday afternoon helping my mother plan the flyer, until



she said that the formatting* was very frustrating and it was time for us to go and find my father. We found him in the kitchen, fixing up a plate of cheese and crackers. He offered us some and for a few minutes we all sat munching at the table. I realized I was actually very hungry. A cracker or two was not going to be enough.

“So, girls,” he asked us, “what kind of treat are you going to make for the party?” I guessed my father was hungry, too.

Noa and I looked at each other. We hadn’t even thought of that. “Us? Won’t my dad be doing the cooking?” asked Noa.

“Sure. But you two always have great ideas for new snacks and meals. Remember how you came up with that orange juice and soda drink when you were only four or five years old?”

“Isa-Noa Betta Soda! Aunt Jackie still makes them for us all the time!” nodded Noa happily.

“Mmm,” I agreed. “I could go for one of those right now!”

“Well, listen,” my father smiled, looking at



his watch, “Bob’s at the diner, making dinner for everyone. Should we go help him? Then at the same time, you can work on something special for the party!”

We left Matias napping and my mother finishing up the flyer, and headed over to the diner. My father helped Bob make pizzas for our supper while Noa and I got to work on one of our own. We started with tomato sauce, but I tossed in a few flakes of dried chili pepper to spice it up a bit. For toppings, we arranged slices of raw avocado between strips of grilled chicken, then added a big squeeze of lime and lots of gooey mozzarella.

My mother and Matias arrived just after Louise and Jackie, who were playing the jukebox and singing as they mixed up a huge jug of fruit punch. Matias started dancing around. We quickly set places for everyone. In the kitchen the timer on the oven went ‘ping’.

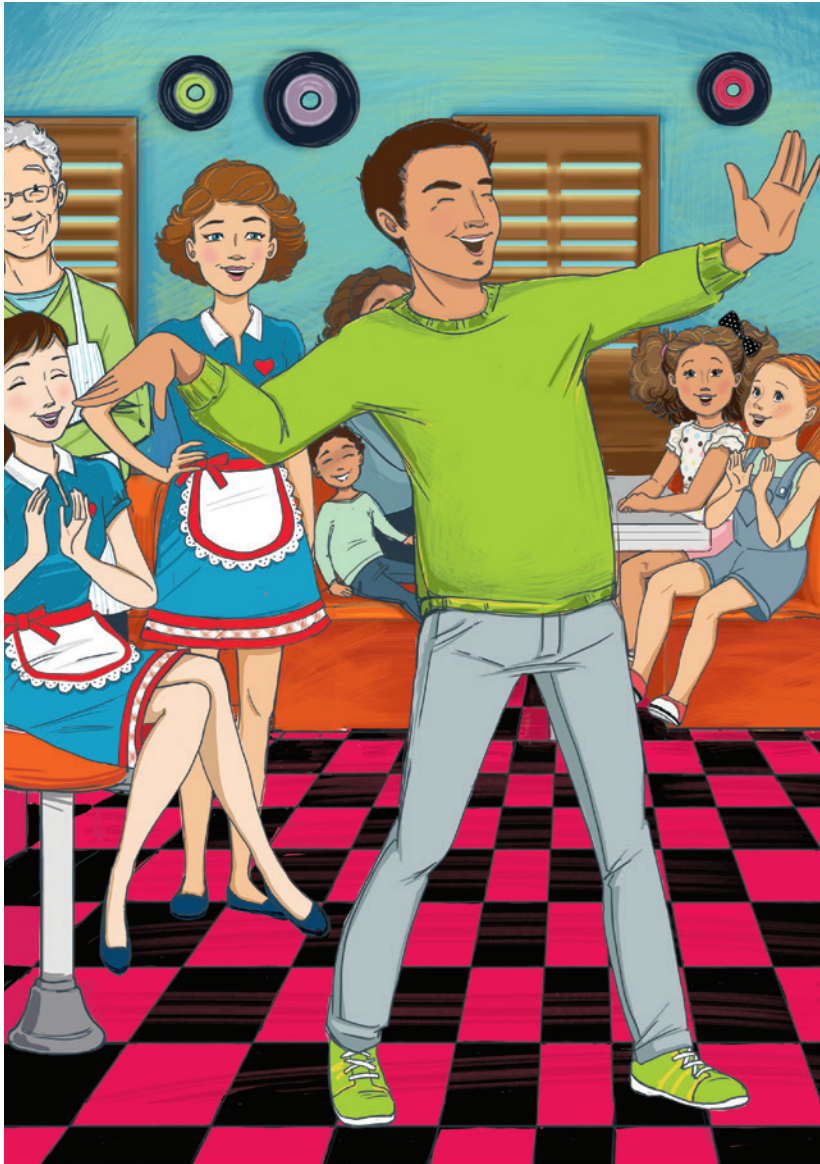
We made a grand entrance with our beautiful pizza, and everyone ‘oohed’ and ‘ahhed’. Everyone tried a slice, and guess what? Even Matias loved



it! Bob decided he would make more so we could hand out free slices along with pink lemonade on the big day, as a special treat to thank people for coming to the party.

After dinner we listened to more music on the jukebox and Jackie taught us how to lip sync* to silly songs from the fifties. It was really funny. Especially when my father pretended he was a singer named Doris Day and sang a song about when he was just a little girl. We giggled so hard I nearly fell out of the booth!





The weeks flew by and, before we knew it, the event was only days away. Between keeping up with homework and soccer, helping to pack the food for the soup kitchen, and planning our party, we'd been really busy bees. I had to get up fifteen minutes earlier than usual every morning just to fit in my piano practice.

With help from Gladys, Alice, and Jackie, we'd distributed flyers all over town, but we still had more. We wondered what to do with them all, until my father surprised Noa and me with awesome blue roller skates.

"Now you can hand out the last of the flyers for the party in style!" he told us. "Jackie told me she can teach you girls how in no time!"

It was true, Jackie was a pro on roller skates, and so was Louise.



On Friday, when we arrived at the diner after school, we saw Bob had set up a table outside with a big box beside it for the food bank



donations. Jackie was sitting at the table, working on some new menus. We roller-skated back and forth between the diner door and the end of the sidewalk — kind of slowly because we both needed more practice. Jackie kept calling out instructions, “Squat like a duck! Remember to glide!”

There is a big park with a playground just down the street from the diner, so lots of families were walking by. We handed out flyers while wobbling on our skates. A lot of people stopped to ask Jackie questions, and some of them went in and bought something, too. By the time we ran out of flyers I was exhausted, but my roller-skating skills were improving!





Chapter Six

A SURPRISE GUEST

It was a beautiful sunny Sunday morning when we arrived at the diner to set up for the big day. We placed tables outside the front door, near the box for food donations. Helium balloons blew in the breeze beside the awning*.

People started arriving as soon as we opened the doors. Alice and Gladys brought all their friends from bridge club*. The girl with the pink sweater and her boyfriend were back. Jack was there with his family. Our bus driver Betty, some teachers, classmates, and people who worked for Carlos came too. By noon the diner was crowded with people enjoying the food and music. People were dropping off food bank items and ordering lunch at the tables out front where the speakers my dad set up were playing fifties party music from the



playlist Mom and Aunt Jackie had made. Some of the teenagers were even starting to dance right there on the sidewalk. Dad kept cooking, flipping burgers and making french fries, and Isa and I handed out sample slices of our special pizza to everyone. Aunt Jackie made pitcher after pitcher of delicious, fresh pink lemonade.

Partway through the afternoon I noticed some paper bags and cardboard boxes piling up next to the donation box. I went to throw them into the recycling bin outside the kitchen door. As I stuffed the cardboard boxes into the bin a movement in the shadows caught my eye. Suddenly I spotted a tiny kitten. It was all grey and stripy.

“Who are you?” I asked.

“Mew!” he said.





He was the cutest thing I'd ever seen, but he looked hungry. I stepped back into the kitchen, quickly poured a bowl of milk, and placed it near the door. At first I couldn't see where he'd gone, but then I realized he was hiding under the recycling bin. I crouched and called, but he wouldn't come out. Green eyes blinked at me from the shadows.

I thought he must be afraid of me so I backed away, hoping he would feel safe enough to come out and eat if he were alone. My heart was pounding. It's really dangerous to run in any kitchen, so I didn't, but it was hard not to as I went to find Isa so I could tell her about the kitten.

She was out front with Aunt Jackie, offering cups of free pink lemonade to passersby and inviting them to try a slice of pizza.

"Isa! Guess what! Guess what I just saw?"

I guess I looked pretty amazed because she tilted her head as she looked at me and teased, "I don't know. A flying horse? A magic rabbit?"

"Almost right! A kitten!"

"What? Where?"



“Just outside the kitchen door. I put a bowl of milk out, because he looks really hungry! Quickly, go and take a peek, I’ll hand out the lemonade. Tiptoe! He’s shy!”

While Isa was going to look at the kitten, a fancy, old-fashioned car pulled up and parked right outside the diner. Carlos came out of the diner with his hands spread wide. “So glad to see you, my friend! Thanks for coming!”

The man put a huge bag of food in the donation bin and turned to shake hands with Carlos. He was very tall and he wore a white hat, which he removed as he smiled and said loudly, “I hear there’s free pizza going around?”

“Coming up!” said Carlos, “Come on in!”

They both went inside. Jackie was still looking at the car with great admiration, “Nice wheels!” she breathed. “Who is that guy?”

Isa came back outside grinning from ear to ear. “He’s adorable!” she squealed. “But he won’t let me near him! I wonder who he belongs to? What should we do?”



“About what?” asked Aunt Jackie. So we told her about the kitten.

She frowned. “Poor thing!” she said. “But there’s not much we can do with this party going on, except keep an eye out for him!”

That was true, the party really kept us hopping. We did look for him again, but he wasn’t there. Just in case, we left a bowl of water and a little bit of chicken on a plate by the door.

As a special surprise at the end of the party, Mom and Aunt Jackie came out of the diner in their uniforms and roller skates and skated along to a big fifties hit called ‘Little Things Mean a Lot’ while carrying trays of mini cupcakes, cookies, and squares to hand out. Isa and I followed more slowly on our own skates. Everyone loved the act, especially the guy with the fancy car. He clapped and clapped at the end. My Aunt Jackie and my mom were both blushing bright pink. One day I hope Isa and I can skate as well as they do.

Before he left, the fancy car guy ordered 20 pizzas from my dad, to be ready the following



Friday.

Dad was shaking his head as he confirmed the order.

“Twenty pizzas, all the same? I just don’t understand!”

“What kind does he want, Dad?” I asked.

“The one you and Isa invented!”

That was pretty neat, but I didn’t have time to think about it. I was too excited about the kitten. The party was winding down and most of our guests were leaving. Isa and I began to explain to my parents.

“Oh dear,” my mom said. My dad was shaking his head. They didn’t seem too excited about the kitten.

“Maybe he’s lost!” I said.

“Yes,” said Mom. “He might be. The best thing to do might be to make some posters and put them up near the diner.”

We all trooped out to the alley behind the kitchen to look for the kitten. We made silly sounds and searched everywhere, but we couldn’t



find him.

“Don’t worry,” said Aunt Jackie. “Either he’s found his way home or he knows there’s food here and he’ll be back.” There was nothing to do but leave a bowl of water by the door and start cleaning up. I sure hoped Aunt Jackie was right.





Chapter Seven

THE CAT-ASTROPHE

On Monday at lunch Noa and I went straight to the library so we could work on posters for the lost kitten. We started by writing ‘LOST KITTEN’ at the top of each sheet of paper. Then, underneath, Noa added:

**LAST SEEN SUNDAY AT THE ‘BITE TO EAT.’
PLEASE COME TO THE DINER FOR DETAILS.**

“What else should be on here?” asked Noa.

“Maybe we should describe the kitten,” I suggested.

“Or we could draw a picture!” Noa said.

“That’s a good idea!” I agreed. We both picked up our colored pencils and got right to work. That’s when the trouble started.



At first I was busy concentrating on my own drawing, but then I looked over at Noa's. "That's not right!" I said.

"What?" said Noa. "What do you mean?"

I pointed at her drawing. "He doesn't have stripes on his face!"

Noa looked at my drawing. "It's you that has it wrong!" she whispered fiercely, as the librarian cast a stern glance in our direction. "He's got green eyes, not yellow, and his stripes are gray, not black and white!"

"You don't even know what you're talking about!" I snapped.

Suddenly the librarian was standing behind our chairs. "What's all the ruckus*, girls?" she wanted to know.

"We're trying to save a lost kitten!" Noa cried, "but we can't agree on what he looks like!"

"Well, I'm afraid you're going to have to disagree more quietly!" she said firmly.

"Sorry," we both mumbled, nodding our heads.

We went back to working on our posters,





but her green-eyed kitten with gray stripes was totally wrong. I couldn't understand it. When the bell rang, our posters were finished but our argument was not!

"Green!" was the last thing Noa hissed at me as we filed into our classroom.

"Yellow!" I shot back. I didn't even look at her for the rest of math period.

On the school bus we didn't talk much. I looked over at Noa, but she was staring out the bus window. We were still mad at each other but, more than that, I knew we were both worried about the kitten. What would happen to him if we couldn't find the owner? The kitten seemed to be lost, so I hoped he would be found, but at the same time I wished he were mine! I would take such good care of a kitten! At least I would know what color his eyes were!



Jackie was running the diner. Louise wasn't there. Gladys and Alice were sitting at the counter,



having apple pie and chamomile tea*.

“How’s the kitten? Have you seen him today?” I asked Jackie as we sat down.

“Yes,” Jackie answered. “I put out some milk this morning, and I caught sight of him drinking it a little while later.”

Noa and I both heaved a big sigh of relief.

“But we can’t keep feeding him this way,” Jackie continued. “Bob says it might attract other animals, like mice, and we can’t have that. We’re going to have to figure something out fast!”

“He can live here at the Bite to Eat! He can be the mascot* for the diner!” cried Noa.

“He can’t live at the diner,” said Jackie quietly, shaking her head. “We’re not permitted to keep pets here.”

“I’d take him in,” said Alice, “but I’ve already got two cats, and that’s all I’m allowed in my apartment!”

“I’d take him in,” said Gladys, “but I’m allergic.”

“He can live with me!” Noa and I both said



at once. We glared at each other.

“Before anyone adopts him we have to at least try and find the owner,” Jackie cut in quickly, before we could say more. “Girls, did you work on the posters?”

We took out our posters and laid them on the counter. “Which one looks more like him?” Noa asked Jackie. But she was staring at me.

“Oh!” said Jackie, “I don’t know! They’re both really great!”

“But his eyes are golden!” I said. “Not green!”

“Are you sure?” asked Jackie. “I guess I didn’t see! He moves too fast! I haven’t really been near him.”

I sighed. Jackie didn’t know what the kitten looked like either. Just then Louise arrived. “How are you, girls?” she asked.

“Bad!” said Noa. “We need to rescue the kitten right now! We can’t just leave him in the alley anymore. Anything could happen to him!”

Noa was right! “Yes, we have to make sure



he's safe!"

"Okay," Louise nodded, putting on her apron. "Jackie, you go help the girls look for the kitten. I'll take care of Gladys and Alice here."

He was nowhere to be found. We searched all through the alley, behind the recycling bin, and along the fence beside the bicycle shop. We washed the milk bowl out, filled it with water and sat quietly, hoping he would appear. No kitten.

Finally Jackie shrugged her shoulders. "Girls, I've got to get back to work. Tonight we'll make copies of your posters and tomorrow I'll put them up around town, okay?"

It wasn't really okay. We wanted to rescue the kitten right away. But there wasn't any way we could just make him appear. Was there?

We trooped back inside. Bob was putting a new tray of cookies into the display case.

"I called the animal shelter," Louise announced. "They're really full right now. They asked if we can foster the kitten until the owner is found."



Bob stared at Louise. “You’ve got to be kidding! We don’t need a cat!”

“Please, Daddy!” Noa cried instantly, “How can you say that? Have you even seen him yet?”

“That’s not the point!” said Bob. “We’re busy. Who is going to take care of a cat!”

“I will!” said Noa, bursting into tears.

“We could take him!” I suggested. “My mother is home a lot of the time!”

“She is not!” cried Noa. “She volunteers two afternoons a week! Plus she’s always taking Matias somewhere!”

“Oh, girls,” said Louise, “don’t fight about it. Let’s just take one step at a time. We’ll keep an eye out for the kitten, put up our posters, and see what happens.”

So that was that. We spent the rest of the afternoon checking the alley every ten minutes, but the kitten did not appear. Noa barely spoke to me.





Chapter Eight

FURRY WORRIES

When we left the diner without the kitten that night I was so upset I couldn't stop crying. My dad relented* and said it was okay to keep leaving food out for another day or two, at least until we knew the kitten was safe. Alice went home and came back with a container of cat food, and we put a little dish of it next to the recycling bin before we left, but I was still sniffly and sad as we climbed into the car.

"It's possible he has a perfectly good home nearby and isn't lost at all, Noa. You need to calm down. Everything will work out. You'll see." I knew Dad was trying to reassure me.

My mom was extra nice to me that night, bringing me a cup of cocoa while I finished up my homework, and later when she tucked me into bed



she said, “Noa, try not to worry too much. You know your dad always takes a little while to get used to a new idea. If that kitten really needs a home we’ll figure something out.”

I hoped she was right, but I was still so upset about the kitten I couldn’t sleep properly. Plus, I was angry with Isa. If anyone was going to adopt the kitten, or even just take care of it for a few days, it should be me! I couldn’t understand why Dad didn’t agree, and I was upset with him, too. Mostly I was just so scared for that poor little kitty all alone outside that I had a big knot in my belly.





After school the next day I went straight to the diner. Isa had a piano lesson. I was sort of glad, because even though we were trying our best to get along, we hadn't solved our problems yet.

"Let me know if you see the kitten, okay?" she said to me, just before I got off the bus.

"Of course I will," I told her. "I'll call you when I get home." Normally she would never have to ask.



"Have you seen the kitten?" I asked Aunt Jackie as I came through the diner door. She looked up from the crowded counter, shaking her head.

"No, honeybun, it's been antsville in here. Why don't you go look?"

I called hello to my dad on my way to look out back, but he was busy taking a pizza out of the oven and he just grunted. I saw that the water dish was still half full, but the food was all gone. I shook the box Alice brought the way she showed



me, put a few little pieces in the bowl, and sat down to wait. Only a few minutes went by before I heard a little ‘mew’!

“Here, kitty, kitty,” I called softly, rattling the box.

A tiny, fluffy head peeked around the corner of the recycling bin. “Mew?” he seemed to ask.

My heart melted. “It’s okay,” I told him, “I won’t hurt you. Come on and have some food!” I kept my voice soft and quiet. Slowly the kitten inched closer to the food dish. I held very still, practically holding my breath. He was so small and brave, doing a funny four-footed tiptoe towards the food. In the shadows, his grey and black stripes made him really well camouflaged*. Wait, black stripes? Oh! Isa was right, some of his stripes were black! I was so surprised I gasped out loud and the kitten dove back under the bin.

It seemed like I spent about an hour on my hands and knees trying to coax* him into coming back out, but no such luck. Mom called to me from the kitchen door, “Come on, Noa. It’s time



to pack it in.”

“But Mom, we can’t leave him here another night! It’s not safe!” I could feel a familiar lump starting to form in my throat.

“It’s okay, we have a solution!” Mom said, as Aunt Jackie and Alice appeared behind her at the door.

“Well, a temporary solution!” amended Jackie.

Alice held up a cat carrying container. “Mobile home for kitty! If he won’t come to us, we’ll make him a place to stay!”

“What?” I asked.

Aunt Jackie and Alice set up the cat carrier next to the kitchen door. They put an old tea towel down in the bottom and Alice placed a toy mouse filled with catnip* in the corner, like a teddy bear tucked into the bed. Then Aunt Jackie put the food dishes right beside the door to the container.

“This way, if he really has no place to sleep, he might feel safe in here! Not only that, if he does decide he likes it in there, he’ll be much easier to



catch!”

The cat carrier did look cozy. It wasn't a perfect solution, but my mom was right, it was better than nothing. With a long look behind me I left the kitten alone for another night.





Chapter Nine

PAWS TO CONSIDER

On Monday Noa left a message on the phone at my house to let me know she'd seen the kitten and he looked okay, but that they hadn't been able to catch him. Jackie had put up copies of our posters, but no one had called. I frowned when I heard that. Jackie had made copies of Noa's poster as well as mine, so as far as I was concerned half of them were wrong!

On Tuesday neither of us could go check on the kitten because we had a soccer game. That was a really hard day. For one thing, we lost the game, and for another, we were still both feeling touchy* so we weren't having fun, which is, after all, the whole point of playing.





My mother told us when she came to pick us up that Jackie and Louise had spotted and fed the kitten earlier that afternoon, and that someone had phoned about the poster, but it turned out they were looking for an older cat, not a kitten. That was sort of good news and bad news. I think we were both relieved to hear that the kitten seemed to be okay, but it didn't solve any of our problems.

When we dropped Noa off at her house she kissed Matias and thanked my mother for the lift.

"See ya," she said to me.

"See you," I answered, in a small voice.

"Everything okay with you two?" my mother asked me as we pulled out of Noa's driveway.

"Yes, we're just tired, and we lost the game," I fibbed, not really knowing why.

I think my mother knew there was more to it than that, but she just smiled and said, "Okay."



On Wednesday I went to the diner to help pack up the food for the soup kitchen, but it felt



really weird getting off the bus without Noa. Her mom had picked her up straight from school because she had a dentist appointment, so she couldn't come with me. I knew she was really upset about it.

"It's not like I can't have my teeth cleaned another day!" she fumed* to me at lunch. "But Mom says we would have to wait another six weeks if she cancels, and it's not a good idea to break appointments if you really don't have to."

"Gee, Noa, that's too bad," I told her. I wanted to tell her that I would look out for the kitten, but I didn't want to make her feel worse.

"Don't try and catch the kitten without me there!" she told me, as though she had been reading my mind.

"What do you mean, Noa? Don't you think the most important thing is to make sure he's safe?"

"Of course! I just don't...ooh!" Noa stamped her foot. "I just want to be there, okay? Promise you won't try and catch him without



me?”

“Okay, Noa,” I said, and just then the bell rang, but I wasn’t very happy about the promise I had made.

I couldn’t believe Noa thought she should get to keep the kitten. I thought she was just being selfish. If anyone was going to adopt the kitten, or even just take care of it for a few days, it should be me! She didn’t really seem to know very much about cats. I’d been reading up on how to take care of them, plus I did a project on cats last year.



Everyone at the diner was just as friendly and nice as usual, and Jackie helped me pack up all the food really quickly, but it wasn’t the same without Noa. My mother hadn’t arrived yet by the time we were done, so Jackie said I might as well go check on the kitten.

“I saw him just before the lunch rush*,” she told me. “He’s probably expecting a pizza!”

I smiled, but didn’t answer. I didn’t feel up



to jokes. I opened the kitchen door quietly and sat by the carrying case.

“Here, kitty, kitty!” I called softly, shaking a little box of treats that Jackie had given me. I dropped a few into the bowl next to the water dish. It didn’t take long before I caught a glimpse of movement from the corner of my eye, and saw two golden eyes peering at me out of the shadows. Little white paws padded out into the sun. The kitten paused and stretched, licking one white paw and washing his tiny white face. He was a beautiful shade of grey, with black and white stripes like a tiny tiger. He was so sweet I almost wanted to cry.

“Here, kitty,” I called again, keeping my voice just above a whisper. He crept closer to the dish and to me, watching me carefully. I didn’t move. Finally he was at the bowl, nibbling the cat treats, lapping the water and twitching his tail and ears.

When the treats were gone he said, “Meow!” and looked at me, so I poured some into my hand



and held it out. Slowly he crept up and began to eat right out of my hand. Carefully I stroked his soft fur with my free hand. He purred a bit and didn't run. I wanted to pick him up for a snuggle, but then I might not be able to put him down. I had promised Noa I wouldn't try to catch him without her. Suddenly the door banged open and the kitten disappeared down the alley like a streak of grey fur.

"Oh!" I cried, looking up to see my mother at the door.

"Sorry," she said to me, "I didn't mean to scare the kitten off!"

"That's okay," I answered her, but I was disappointed. "Did you see him? Isn't he beautiful?"

"I saw a ball of fur move very fast!" my mother laughed. "I don't think that kitten is in any trouble at all!"

It was true, he seemed really clean and healthy. On the other hand, he was just too small to be on his own. I really wanted to take him



home. I was quiet and distracted*, thinking about the kitten all the way to the soup kitchen.

“Cat got your tongue?” joked my mother as we drove home. “You barely had a word to say to Jack and everyone!”

“Sorry, I guess you’re right.” I tried to smile. “The whole problem with the kitten is really bothering me.” Unexpectedly, I felt my eyes fill with tears. “Noa is mad at me because I said I wanted to keep the kitten, but it was only because her dad said maybe it wasn’t a good idea for them to keep it!”

“Oh, honey, we don’t even know if that kitten really needs a home!”

“But no one has claimed it either! It’s too little to be outside all the time!”

“I know,” my mother said soothingly*, “I’m sure it will all work out for the best, but you’re going to have to find a way to work it out with Noa. She’s your best friend, after all.”

I sighed a really big sigh. My mother was right. I had to do something to fix things with Noa right away.





Chapter Ten

LET'S WORK TOGETHER!

It was a beautiful day, and our teachers said we could have our lunch on the playground if we wanted to. I sure did. I was thinking how lucky it was that our weather had been good ever since the day of the fundraiser, the day we found the kitten. Imagine if we'd had thunderstorms or days of solid rain! At least he was warm and dry. I sure hoped Jackie had remembered to put out some food.

Lost in thought, I was making my way across the playground to a tree where I like to sit when I heard Isa calling my name, "Noa! Noa! Wait up for me!"

I stood there while she ran to catch up with me, her lunch pack swinging from her shoulder, feeling bad that I hadn't waited for her in the first place. We'd been eating lunch together almost



every day since kindergarten. “I really need to talk to you!” she panted.

“You want to sit under the tree?” I nodded at the rock under the rowan tree* where we’d shared snacks and secrets so many times before.

“Sure,” said Isa, smiling at me. We sat down on the wide, flat rock and unwrapped our sandwiches.

“Did you get the message I left yesterday?” Isa asked me. I nodded. She’d phoned my house to say she’d seen the kitten and he was fine.

“Thanks for letting me know,” I said seriously.

Isa took a deep breath. “I’m really sorry we’ve been arguing,” she said.

I stared at her. “Me too!” I answered, but my voice came out a bit wobbly.

“I mean,” Isa continued, “it doesn’t matter what color his eyes are, or his stripes...”

“Oh!” I interrupted. “Isa, you were right! He does have black stripes! I don’t know how I mixed that up...”



“It doesn’t matter!” Isa broke in. “The main thing is, we both want to be sure the kitten is safe. I don’t care if he lives with you or me or somebody else, as long as he’s okay.”

“You’re right, Isa. Let’s not argue about it anymore. Let’s just rescue him once and for all!”

“Yes! If we work together as a team, I know we can figure something out, Noa!”

“Like what? He’s so scared of us! How are we going to catch him?”

“Yesterday he let me pet him! I didn’t say anything on the message, but I really think he’s starting to trust us. We’ve been feeding him for days now!”

“Really, he let you pet him?” I was a bit jealous, but mostly I was really happy that he seemed to be getting tamer.

“Yes! If my mother hadn’t opened the door and scared him off, I think he would have stayed.” Isa looked at me seriously, “I didn’t try to pick him up, because I promised I wouldn’t try and catch him without you there, but I think he would have





let me.”

“Wow!” I thought hard for a minute. “You know what? When he runs away, he always goes the same way, down behind the recycling bin to the fence by the bicycle shop.”

“So?” said Isa, frowning.

“Well, if we put out food for him this afternoon, and then one of us stays near the food while the other blocks the escape route...”

“With what?”

“Oh, I don’t know, a board or... I know! A serving tray from the diner might work! We just have to wait until he shows up, then close the gap behind him.”

“As soon as he’s finished eating we’ll pop him into the cat carrier!” exclaimed Isa.

We looked at each other and grinned. We both knew exactly what we wanted to say next, so we shouted it out together as we high-fived.

“Isa-Noa Betta Idea!”



As we ran off to join a pick-up soccer game with some of our friends, I felt happier than I had in days. Whatever happened with the kitten, at least Isa and I were okay. Still, I could barely wait to get to the diner.





Chapter Eleven

TWO HEADS ARE BETTER THAN ONE!

Noa and I burst through the front door of the diner in a rush of excitement. Gladys and Alice were at the counter as usual, Jackie was serving some teenagers in the booth, and Louise was making a grilled cheese sandwich for a man in a bright green suit.

“How’s it going, girls?”

“How was school today?”

“Want a snack?”

“Going to check on the kitten!” Noa answered and grabbed my hand as we slipped through the kitchen and out the back door, grabbing the box of treats from the shelf and some milk from the fridge on our way. Bob was nowhere in sight, but I didn’t have time to wonder why.



I poured a little milk into the dish while Noa shook the box of treats. We practically held our breath while we waited. Nothing happened.

“Let me try!” I said, taking the box and rattling it myself.

“Wait!” cried Noa, “we forgot to find a board or something to block the bin!”

“Oh, right! What can we use?” I looked around me, but I couldn’t see anything that would work.

Noa rummaged through the recycling bin and found a cardboard box that was just the right size. “This is perfect. If he runs, he’ll run into the open box!”

“Yes, but what if he doesn’t come at all?” I worried.

Noa smiled at me, “I know he will! Hold on a second, I have another great idea!”

She ran back into the kitchen and came back a few minutes later with a small saucer holding a spoonful of tuna salad.

“Jackie said not to give him very much



because the mayonnaise might not be good for him. But the smell should work!” She bent over and put a pinch of tuna in the bowl for the kitten. I kind of wanted a tuna salad sandwich and a glass of milk myself. It was too bad the kitten couldn’t stay at the diner, I thought to myself, since he was practically becoming a regular customer. I smiled, and just then I saw him.

“Noa,” I whispered, not daring to move. “There he is!”

Noa turned her head slightly and saw him too. “Here, kitty,” she called softly, and he came!

He headed straight for the food dish. Noa slowly backed away, slipping the box into the gap between the bin and the wall. He finished up the tuna in seconds and lapped hungrily at the milk. I was holding the dish with the rest of the fish. He looked up at me and meowed. I knew he wanted more. Should I give it to him? I looked at Noa.

“Put the dish down, then try to pick him up when he goes to it!” urged Noa.

“Okay,” I whispered. “Here kitty, it’s okay.



Have a little more.” I put the plate down and he went for it right away. “That’s okay,” I stroked his back. “Not too much! There’s mayonnaise in there!”

I scooped him up, but he twisted and scratched so fast I had to let go. He skittered away, right into the box! Noa carefully lifted the box and turned it upright, then she closed one flap. The kitten glowered* at us from a corner.

“Gee, Isa, you were right. He does have golden eyes!” Noa said. “And black stripes! I can’t understand it! I was so sure his eyes were green!”

I looked up from gazing at the kitten to answer her, and as I did so I caught my breath. Over Noa’s shoulder I could see another kitten, lapping at the tuna we’d left on the ground.

“I think maybe I know why!” I said to Noa, quietly. “Very carefully, look behind you now!”

Noa looked a bit worried, but she turned her head and then I heard her gasp. “Oh, look! There he is!” She was beside him in a flash, and he didn’t seem scared at all. She didn’t try to touch him, she just whisked away the tuna dish and placed it inside the cat



carrier. He hopped right in behind it and she shut the door.

The whole thing had happened so fast. Now I was sitting in front of a box with one kitten, and she was holding a cat container with another! The second kitten finished off the tuna in about one second and looked at Noa for more. “Mew!” he said.

“I know,” Noa told him, “but first we’ll get you some water.”

She looked at me. “What are we going to do now?”

“I have no idea!” I answered. This was as far as we had gotten in our plan. It had worked twice as well as we had expected!

Suddenly the kitchen door opened and Bob was standing there with Roxy, who is a friend of my parents.

“This is Roxy, she’s a vet!*” said Bob. “She told me she’d come and check on the kitten for us. Have either of you seen him?”

“Yes!” answered Noa, “He’s here!” She held up the cat carrier.





“And here!” I said, pointing to the box.

“What?” asked Bob. So we explained.

I was so glad to see Roxy. She’s really good with animals. She put both kittens in the carrier, and they didn’t try to scratch her or to escape. Roxy said she would take the kittens back to the animal hospital for a check-up. She said she’d find out how old the kittens were and give them any shots they might need. In the meantime she wanted us to make sure there weren’t any more kittens in the alley. Jackie agreed to help us keep it staked out for the next few days. “We will keep our eyes peeled!*” she promised.

“You kids are clearly the best kitten catchers in town!” said Roxy.

“We gave them tuna salad with mayonnaise. Was that bad?” I asked.

“Well,” said Roxy, “It’s definitely not the best thing for kittens, but I bet it was pretty good bait! Don’t worry, it probably didn’t hurt them.”

She took the kittens away in her car and I was sad and glad all at the same time. Noa felt



the same, I could tell. When my mother arrived to pick me up we told her the whole story. She and Louise gave each other a look that said, “We have to talk.” As we drove home I didn’t know what was going to happen, but I sure was dreaming of a furry little golden-eyed friend.





Chapter Twelve

A PURR-FECT DAY

On our way home Mom asked Dad about Roxy.

“Where have I seen her before?” she asked. Aunt Jackie piped up, “I remember her, too!”

“But from where?” asked Mom.

“At Carlos and Lorraina’s anniversary last year, remember?” my dad answered. “She’s Al’s wife. She came to the meeting this afternoon, and when I remembered that she’s a vet I had to tell her what’s been going on. Wasn’t that nice of her to offer to help? I mean, really! Perfect timing!”

“Who’s Al?” I asked. “What meeting?”

“Al’s the guy who really liked your pizza, Noa,” my father began.

“The guy with the fancy car!” exclaimed



Jackie.

“Why were you having a meeting with them, Dad?”

My mother interrupted, “We’ll talk about it tomorrow, honey.” Talk about what? I wondered, but I couldn’t really think about anything except a fluffy little green-eyed, grey-striped kitten.



Roxy phoned our house later that evening, but I had already gone to bed by then and I didn’t hear about it until the next morning.

Mom gave me the news along with a glass of orange juice and a plate of toast. Aunt Jackie and Dad had already left for the breakfast shift at the diner hours ago. Mom would join them as soon as I was on my way to school. Mornings at my house were always kind of rushed, so I was surprised when she sat down at the table with me.

“Noa,” she began, “I had a long talk with your dad last night. We’ve agreed that you can foster one of the kittens.”



“Oh thank you, thank you!” I cried, jumping up from my breakfast to hug her.

“Take the bus to Isa’s after school. Here’s a note for Betty. Roxy is going to meet you there with the kittens.”

“Really?” I couldn’t believe my ears, it was too good to be true!

“We’ll all have supper together tonight. Carlos and your dad also have something they need to talk to you girls about.”

“Besides the kittens?”

“Besides the kittens,” she said firmly. “Now finish your breakfast and scoot, kiddo, or you’re going to miss your bus!”



Isa climbed on the bus a few stops after I did, grinning from ear to ear.

“Guess what my mother told me this morning!” she said as she sat down beside me on the seat.

“Roxy is bringing the kittens to your house



after school?” I guessed, grabbing her hands.

“And we both get to foster a kitten!” she squealed. We both giggled and chattered the rest of the way to school, exclaiming over the differences and similarities between the two little kittens we’d thought were one.

It was hard to pay attention that day, but somehow we managed. Our teacher only had to ask us to stop talking about the kittens in class twice. By the time we were packing our bags to go home, I was so excited and eager to see them I could barely stay in my seat.



Matias and Lorraina were waiting for us by the bus stop.

“Come see kittens!” Matias shouted happily, beaming at us.

“Roxy’s here?” I asked Lorraina.

“The kittens are here?” asked Isa.

“Yes,” answered Lorraina, “the kittens and Roxy are in the kitchen. Let’s go and see.”



We raced for the door, Matias and Lorraina trailing behind us.

Roxy was sitting at the kitchen table with a cup of tea. The two kittens were curled up together on a baby blanket in the bottom of Alice's cat carrier.

Roxy smiled, "Hi girls! How are the kitten catchers today?"

"How are the kittens?" I asked anxiously. Isa and I both squatted down next to the carrier cage.

"The kittens are fine!" Roxy said. "Would you like to try and hold one?"

Isa frowned, "Last time I tried to pick him up, he was scared. He tried to scratch me!"

"Well," said Roxy, opening the carrier cage, "I don't think they're very scared now." She picked up one of the kittens gently and handed him to Isa, showing us how to hold him properly. Then she gave the other one to me. I held the warm bundle of fur. Green eyes blinked at me.

"Hi," I said. The kitten mewed and snuggled up to me. We stayed on the floor playing with the kittens all afternoon.





Before Roxy left, we fed the kittens special food for young cats that she brought us. She left us her home phone number and that of the vet clinic where she works. The kittens will need regular checkups, just like we do. Roxy said that if no one has claimed the kittens by now, it's not very likely anyone will.

"So we'll get to keep the kittens?" asked Isa. I looked anxiously at Lorraina and Roxy.

"If we don't hear from anyone, yes, I think you probably can," said Lorraina, "but Louise and Bob will be here soon. We can talk about it then."

My parents, Aunt Jackie, and Carlos arrived together at supper time, with yummy tacos for all. Lorraina had prepared a salad ahead of time, so we all sat down to eat with the two sleepy kittens at our feet. There was a lot to talk about. First, Mom announced that the Bite to Eat fundraising party had been such a success that they had decided to have one every three months! I am going to need to practice my rollerskating!



Even more exciting, the mysterious meeting with Al turned out to be a proposal*. Al wants to market our pizza in grocery stores all over the country!

“What do you think, girls? It’s your invention. Do you want to do it?”

“Yes, yes, yes!” we cried.

“Can we donate some of the profits to the food bank?” asked Isa.

“Can we donate to the animal shelter, too?” I wondered.

“Sure, but then the rest should go into a college fund*,” said my mom.

“Great idea!” said Carlos. “There’s one more important decision to make, girls. What are you going to call the pizza?”

Isa just looked at me and we both knew the answer right away. With a big grin and a high five, we announced the name of our greatest creation to date: ‘Isa-Noa Betta Pizza’.



It took us a little bit longer to name the kittens, but when we remembered arguing about what color their eyes were, we figured it out. ‘Verdigris’ is a word that means the kind of green you see on copper roofs or statues. Isa told me the definition, and it’s one I’ll never forget, because it’s the color of my kitten’s eyes, and now it’s her name. I call her ‘Verdi’ for short. That’s right, he is a she. Roxy told me. Isa’s kitten is a male, probably Verdi’s brother. She’s called him ‘Oro,’ which is a Spanish word that means ‘gold’.

We never did see any other cats in the alley again, so where they came from is a mystery. Roxy said they were very lucky little kittens to find nice girls like us to take care of them. Dad said they were very smart little kittens who could probably read the menu at the diner! I think they just wanted to come to a party. Whatever the reason, that day at the diner changed everything for Isa, for me, and for the kittens. Best of all, now we’ve found a way of sharing our good luck by making pizza and throwing parties. Isa-Noa Betta Plan!



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 this story.*

accounting: *adding up, and keeping track of, money spent and earned*

apprentice: *someone who is learning a skill or a job from an expert*

aroma: *a pleasant smell*

arugula: *also known as salad rocket, a leafy green from the mustard family*

awning: *a roof-like shelter, often made of canvas, that extends over a window or door to provide protection from sun or rain*

bridge club: *bridge is a card game, and a bridge club is a group of people who meet regularly to play bridge*

camouflaged: *blending with the surroundings, making the animal or object harder to see*

catnip: *a plant from the mint family that smells good to cats*



central island: *a kitchen counter that is not attached to a wall, but stands in the middle of the floor, so that work can be done from all four sides*

chamomile tea: *tea made from the dried flowers of the chamomile plant*

chorused: *spoke together, at the same time*

closing the cash: *adding up all the money and all the receipts for the day*

coax: *to get a person or animal to do something by talking in a gentle, friendly way*

college fund: *money set aside to pay for college*

decor: *the style or type of decorations and furniture in a room*

dismay: *disappointment or sadness*

distracted: *not being able to pay attention because you're thinking about something else*

empanadas: *baked or fried pastries filled with tasty ingredients like cheese and meat*

food bank: *a place where food is collected so it can be given out to people who don't have enough money to buy food*

food supply service: *a business that sells and*



delivers food to restaurants and cafeterias

formatting: *creating the design or form of
a document, such as a flyer or a book*

fumed: *showed great frustration*

glowered: *stared with anger*

harsh critic: *someone who is difficult to please*

hep cats: *fashionable people who always know
what's new (1950s slang)*

lip sync: *pretending to sing a song by moving
your lips along with the words as it plays*

lunch rush: *a busy time in a restaurant during
the lunch hour*

mascot: *a person or thing that is meant to
bring good luck to a place or a team*

Mesdames et Messieurs: *french for
'ladies and gentlemen'*

minestrone soup: *thick vegetable soup
with beans and pasta*

no time flat: *very quickly, in no time at all*

profits: *the amount of money you have
earned after subtracting your expenses*

proposal: *a detailed plan or offer*



pun: *a joke based on a word having different meanings, or a joke based on two words that sound the same*

quiche: *a type of pie made with an egg and cheese filling which often includes other ingredients such as ham or even spinach*

regulars: *customers who visit the same restaurant regularly or often*

relented: *became more forgiving*

restaurant critic: *someone who writes about restaurants for newspapers or magazines*

rowan tree: *also called mountain ash, a tree that grows white flowers followed by bright orange-red berries*

ruckus: *noise, commotion*

selling like hot cakes: *selling very quickly*

shindig: *a really great party*

soothingly: *in a calm and gentle manner*

soup kitchen: *a place that serves free meals to people who need food*

special: *a meal that is not normally on the menu, and may also have a lower price*

touchy: *sensitive, easily upset*

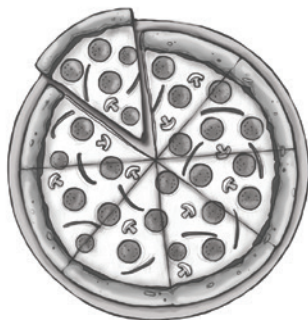


vet: *short for veterinarian, meaning an animal doctor*

“We will keep our eyes peeled!”: *an expression meaning that we will keep watch to or look out for something or someone*



Isa-Noa Betta Pizza



Make your very own version of Isa-Noa Betta Pizza!
You will need a little bit of assistance from a helpful grown-up, as well as the following ingredients:

- pizza dough
- pizza sauce
- dried chili pepper flakes
- 2 grilled, boneless chicken breasts
- 1 avocado
- 1 lime
- 2-3 cups grated mozzarella cheese
- sprinkle of grated Romano or Parmesan cheese, if desired

1. Start by making your favorite pizza dough, or use a prepared variety. Place it on a pizza pan or cookie sheet. Preheat your oven to 450°, or as directed if you are using prepared dough.

2. Use the flat back of a large spoon to spread pizza sauce over



the entire surface.

3. Sprinkle on a few flakes of dried chili peppers, if you like your food spicy!

4. Cut the grilled chicken breast into strips, lengthwise. Arrange the strips of grilled chicken breast on the pizza like spokes on a bicycle wheel. Place any leftover chicken in the center of the circle.

5. Leaving the skin in place, cut the avocado in half, and then quarters. Remove the pit. If the avocado is ripe the skin should easily peel away from each quarter. Discard the skin. Slice each avocado quarter into thinner wedges. Place the avocado slices in between the strips of chicken. Top with a generous squeeze of fresh lime juice, and plenty of grated mozzarella cheese. Sprinkle a little grated Parmesan or Romano cheese over the mozzarella if you like.

6. Bake on the lowest rack of your oven at 450° for 10-12 minutes, until the cheese starts to look golden brown, or as indicated on your pizza dough directions.

7. Let cool for five minutes before slicing and serving.

Yum!





The Power of a Girl

For every *Our Generation*® product you buy, a portion of sales goes to Free The Children's Power of a Girl Initiative to help provide girls in developing countries an education—the most powerful tool in the world for escaping poverty.

Did you know that out of the millions of children who aren't in school, 70% of them are girls? In developing communities around the world, many girls can't go to school. Usually it's because there's no school available or because their responsibilities to family (farming, earning an income, walking hours each day for water) prevent it.

Over the past two years, Free The Children has had incredible success with its Year of Water and Year of Education initiatives, providing 100,000 people with clean water for life and building 200 classrooms for overseas communities. This year, they celebrate the Year of Empowerment, focusing on supporting alternative income projects for sustainable development.

The most incredible part is that most of Free The Children's funding comes from kids just like you, holding lemonade stands, bake sales, penny drives, walkathons and more.

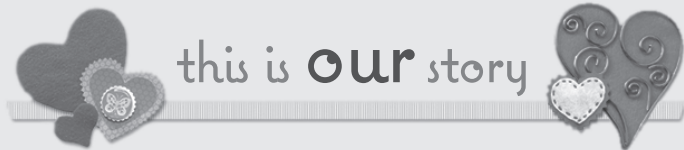
Just by buying an *Our Generation* product you have helped change the world, and you are powerful (beyond belief!) to help even more.

If you want to find out more, visit:
www.ogdolls.com/free-the-children



FREE THE CHILDREN
children helping children through education

Free The Children provided the factual information pertaining to their organization.
Free The Children is a 501c3 organization.



We are an extraordinary generation of girls.
And have we got a story to tell.

Our Generation® is unlike any that has come before. We're helping our families learn to recycle, holding bake sales to support charities, and holding penny drives to build homes for orphaned children in Haiti. We're helping our little sisters learn to read and even making sure the new kid at school has a place to sit in the cafeteria.

All that and we still find time to play hopscotch and hockey. To climb trees, do cartwheels all the way down the block and laugh with our friends until milk comes out of our noses. You know, to be kids.

Will we have a big impact on the world? We already have. What's ahead for us? What's ahead for the world? We have no idea. We're too busy grabbing and holding on to the joy that is today.

Yep. This is our time. This is our story.

www.ogdolls.com





About the Author

Erika Nadine White lives with her family in a small village by a lake. She has been writing poetry and fiction for most of her life. This is her first story for children.

About the Illustrator

Passionate about drawing from an early age Géraldine decided to pursue her studies in computer multimedia in order to further develop her style and technique. Her favourite themes to explore in her illustrations are fashion and urban life. In her free time, Géraldine loves to paint and travel. She is passionate about horses and loves spending time at the stable, it's where she feels most at peace and gives her time to think and fuel her creativity.

This story came to life because of all the wonderful people who contributed their creativity and vision, including Joe Battat, Dany Battat, Véronique Casavant, Véronique Chartrand, Natalie Cohen, Ralph de Smit, Karen Erlichman, Jenny Gambino, Sandy Jacinto, Elizabeth Lamarche, Loredana Ramacieri, Conor Ryan, Garrett Ryan, Kirsten Shute, Veronica Sorcher, Darcy White, Karen Woods and Donna Yakibchuk.





this is OUR story®

A Fair Share at the Diner

Isa™ and Noa™ have been best friends all their lives. They do everything together, from hanging out at the local diner to volunteering at the food bank. Everyone is in for a whole lot of fun when they decide to combine the two and throw an amazing fundraising party!

They're in for a few surprises when some unexpected guests turn up at the celebration. Like a mysterious man in a fancy car who places a very tall order. And a hungry little kitten with nowhere to call home! What started out as a party turns into a puzzle.

Isa and Noa are all about sharing, whether it's good food or good times. But how can you share a kitten? It's a cat-astrophic argument that just may break up the best friendship ever! Something's cooking at the diner, with a secret ingredient that might make a big difference for everyone. What could it be?

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

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