

SMALL WONDERS

Bobby had been barking all morning. He usually wasn't this jumpy. I imagined that some birds were harassing him. But I had no idea what was really going on. It was a Saturday morning, and I was dressed and lying on my bed. I could see the sun shining through the window and I noticed how it showed someone in silhouette watching me. He made me feel safe. I followed the lines of the face until I reached the point of recognition. It was Danny.

"Danny, what's bother Bobby. He's been making that noise all morning."

"I don't know. Let me go check."

I watched from the window as Danny found Bobby. He immediately settled him down. Bobby's desperate barks were transformed into happy yelps. Danny had a way with living things. He was blessed with the power. I guess that he knew too much ever to be truly contented. But he never let it get him down. He always had my back.

Danny went about his business. Maybe he was helping Tom and John in the barn. John had things in control there. Since my father was away so much, he had taught John from an early age. And he ran the barn as his own. Tom and Danny would do what was needed to keep things going. But both had bigger dreams.

Danny was special. In his own way, he was a wonder. He could almost tame the raging storm. At least, that was how he always made me feel. But he had a storm of his own that was brewing inside. He did all that he could to calm that tempest.

As Danny became older, he realized that there wasn't enough work for him around here. It would only be a little while before he would have to make that fateful step. Tom had already graduated. He was delaying the inevitable. But he already had plans to move to big city. He just needed to ground his plans more. Danny wouldn't be help back. He still had to complete his studies. But once he was free, he would chase that wild hare.

His dreams were bigger than the world. So I knew that this place couldn't hold him down for long. At times, I admired his rebelliousness. Tom would play the part of the older brother, but Danny had a deeper understanding. He would never put up with Tom's antics. As the oldest, John didn't have time for their rivalries. He'd watch them play it out. When there was work to get done, they would all rally together, and the battles would go by the wayside.

It was strange how Tom was waiting for Danny to make that first step. My father had already gotten to know life outside of our realm. But the rest of us only had a few glimpses. We had visited relatives in Montreal. But we were all whisked back to the country. And that was how it was meant to stay. Times were tough all over. That may have been one of the factors that held Tom back. Danny was going to explore no matter what might be the result. He needed to venture off into that dangerous wilderness.

I knew that I was going to lose Danny's counsel. He seemed to have an insight that no one else had here. I watched him in the field playing with Bobby. He had pulled the pooch back from the brink. Danny knew. There hadn't been any kind of animal that freaked Bobby. It was the second sight. In their frolicking, Bobby and Danny shared that same view. With that gift, Danny knew that he was also given a curse. He could sense coming disasters. That was what made him so restless. He didn't want to hang around for the tumultuous end. I watched all these living creatures in the effort to discover that mysterious secret. Could I ever conjure up the

power to affect the world in a deeper way? I was afraid that I was treading upon the devils's territory. This wasn't really a tradition in our family. I just recognized something unique in Danny's way of life.

Later that morning, I went out to play with Bobby. He appreciated me. But he didn't communicate with me in quite the same way as he did with Danny. Try as I may, I couldn't figure out how to tame Bobby completely. I had to give in to his wildness. And I flattered his independence so that he might show me a little affection. He loved to jump up and down. And I couldn't get him remain calm. So I just played along until he tuckered me out.

Danny was long gone. He had helped in the barn, then he took off. Maybe he was walking by the tracks. Or he had found some friends. Or he had just headed into town.

The youngest ones were playing inside. And my other sisters were nowhere to be found. Maybe they were on a shopping trip. I went back to lying on the bed. I had done all the work that I needed. I wanted to rest. I had a book next to me. But I didn't feel very much like reading.

I was fortunate that I could find peace of mind away from everyone. I almost felt that there was something wrong that I was just lying about. I wasn't really sleepy. I was just taking it easy. My restlessness was hardly subdued. There must have been something for me to do. Bobby's life had such a clarity to it. That kind of balance had its appeal. But he always was waiting for something to happen to him. Now and then, he'd find a puzzle that would obsess him for the whole day. He'd hear a strange noise. Or he'd see something strange in his view. But everything was about returning to a state of normalcy. Every day he knew that he would be fed. And we'd play with him now and then. It was a life of utter simplicity.

What was I afraid of? Why couldn't I just let go? Even as I relaxed on the bed, I felt tense. Would there ever be a time in my life when I felt that there was nothing to worry about? Right now, I would really find no problem in just falling asleep. That could relieve me of my troubles. I was a friendly person. I didn't lack for friends. And my family were more than supportive of me.

I again tried to read. My book might offer me the comfort that I craved. After all, it was next to impossible to entertain myself by just thinking about nothing. I hadn't been raised to be so self-centered. I had just subtracted myself from everything that was going on. And here I was alone in our room. I felt lucky that I could come here and not have someone else taking up my time. But it felt so weird. What was I supposed to be doing?

I'm sure Margaret could have suggested some chore for me to do. But I had spent a good part of the morning helping out. So my rest was well-deserved. There were so many of us that we could easily take care of all the tasks together. So what remained. Nothing that I could do would change things in any way. And I couldn't satisfy myself by living like Bruce. He simply accepted the calm. For me, it suggested that something was not right in the world.

My father was probably playing with the radio. He would fool with it in the hope of hearing music from far away. It was almost as if he was communicating long distance. He wanted someone new to hear what he had to say. He was traveling even as he remained on the farm. I was using my mind to propel myself. But I was only lying here immobile on the bed. I needed some kind of conveyance to get me going. An open book could get me started. But I was looking for that answer inside myself. And I didn't feel up to the task. It was almost like praying

without having anyone to pray to. As well, I wasn't asking for anything. It wasn't so much that I was satisfied. I seemed lacking for words. This was all too much for me. If I wasn't going to fall asleep, I needed to go for a walk.

Danny had been chomping on peanuts, and he dropped some as he headed towards the barn. I could see them on the ground just ahead of me. I saw two chipmunks make a beeline towards the nuts. They were gone before I could blink an eye. They gave me an idea. I was bored. I needed some entertainment. I went and gathered a handful of oats from the kitchen. I tossed them down. Then I stepped back. Sure enough, my two furry friends were back for a snack. This got my mind thinking. What would it take to keep my friends coming back for more. They were hardly helpless creatures. And there were enough assorted treats for them on the farm. But if I offered them delicacies, maybe they would do my bidding. I was excited by the possibilities.

Over the next couple of weeks, I got to know the habits of these scampering little folk. I almost had them eating out of my hand. I was a regular St. Francis.

One of the chipmunks had a tuft of white hair on his head that resembled a crown. He was *Rex*. Rex was impetuous. I just had to drop the food on the ground, and he would be on top of me. Rex's rival was just as bold. He'd engage Rex in these crazy little chases just to get a morsel for himself. He was almost mean! He was definitely the imperial type, *Caesar*.

I got to know Rex and Caesar well. They were pals. But they also had their spats. Each wanted to rule the hutch.

I told Helen about my new pets.

"That's silly. Chipmunks are pests. They dig these holes everywhere. They're like little mice."

"I really like them. They're so cute."

The stripes had special meaning for me. It told me that they were blessed. They were fashionable. I imagined myself with a striped spring coat.

"They're so scary."

"I think that they're fashionable. Just as elegant as any Hollywood star."

I had hit her too close to home. She pursed her lips, stuck up her nose, and escaped from my company.

I was sure that my younger siblings would take to my stories of Rex and Caesar.

"Tell us more," said Ricky.

At first, Scott pretended that he was too old for the game.

"Alida, I think that you like animals better than people."

But once he saw my crazy little friends, he became interested. He wanted a pet of his own,

One chipmunk seemed completely useless. He wouldn't scurry for nuts. He wanted his food handed to him.

"I like that one," said Scott. "I'm going to call him Jimmy!"

Jimmy was more than willing to serve anyone who would fill him up with snacks. Scott was really enjoying my game.

Once Ricky heard Scott had his own pet, he wanted one too. "I like that little fellow."

His chipmunk was really shy. It took a lot for him to even approach us.

“His name is Jimmy. Here, Jimmy, come and get it!”

Violet was the last to get in on the act. She was more drawn to the ways of the tabby. So it was a stretch for her to join up with our chipmunk games. But she saw that we were having so much fun that she needed to join along.

I created this elaborate background story. Rex and Caesar were brothers. And Rex was next in line for the throne. But Caesar had tried to depose him. He worked with the rebels. The rebels ended up taking over and sent both brothers away for good. Now they battled to take over the farm. The other chipmunks watched pleasantly as the two feuded. But they were still brothers, and they would unite every time.

“Tell us another story,” said Violet.

“They have their own stories to tell.” We watched them disappear in their hole and then reappear at the center of the field. We couldn’t keep up, but we would delight in the action. It was as if we were at the races.

“We’re each going to pick a chipmunk.” Of course, my pick was Rex. And I am going to put some food in the middle of the field. And the first one to get the food wins for his sponsor.”

Rex could almost read my mind. He knew what I was doing. He was waiting at the end of the hole for me to put the food on the ground..

“This isn’t fair,” said Ricky. But Caesar had his moments when he would beat Rex to the punch.

Jimmy seemed to have everything against him. But he never worried. He always got fed. And Scott felt sorry for him.

Violet had her own plan. She wanted to breed a super-chipmunk. He would be faster and smarter than the rest. She took her knowledge from cats and applied it to a new animal. In her own way, she was a committed naturalist.

I was surprised how well that she did. She wasn’t able to surpass Rex. But Man O’ War was a champion. And when Rex let down his guard, a cache of nuts would escape his grasp for the speedy Man O’ War. More than any of us, Violet knew the secrets of the wiles of animals. And she was able to encourage Man O’ War with her soothing voice. It made me frustrated to realize how good she was. I didn’t want Rex to lose his crown.

We all knew about the labyrinth of passageways. But Violet had the map memorized better than any of us. She imagined a room where they all got together and talked about humans. I thought that I was telling the story. But she became more adept than I had been.

As much as these were our pets, they wouldn’t give in to our ways. So our training only gratified their wild nature. I loved their spirit. They were way too impulsive. And I took their capricious for rudeness. They reveled in their own cleverness. They were like spies. You could corner them. But they had their escape hatches to get away. No wonder Rex had such an illustrious career. His enemies were ready to do away with him. And he escaped. Caesar had helped with their final flight. In this they were bound together forever.

Not only did they have their own espionage, but they knew things about us. We were doing their bidding. They had trained us in their own way. For a little entertainment, we were willing to feed them. That only confirmed how cunning they were. The true action occurred under ground. If only we could match their craft, we could accommodate ourselves more

lavishly.

“Rex, I’m not your servant!”

He looked at me with his beady little eyes. I imagined a smile. He flipped around and headed down his hole.

“Just when the fun was about to start.”

I could never make it down that hutch. For now, Rex was calling it quits. He done all the tricks necessary to get meal out of me. Everything beyond that was window dressing. And about to let me in on what he was really thinking

We hadn’t seen Danny in days. My mother was getting worried.

Joseph offered his explanation, “He’s not a baby anymore. Don’t tell me that your brothers didn’t do some bizarre stuff.”

Margaret shrugged her shoulders and made a disparaging gesture. She didn’t like to be reminded of her brothers’ shiftlessness. And she feared Danny giving in to the same emotions.

“He didn’t say anything to me. He didn’t even warn Tom or John.”

When he finally returned late Sunday, he was ready for a whipping. But my father took it all in stride.

“You’re almost man enough to go where you please. Heaven knows that I wish that your brothers were just as adventuresome as you were. But it doesn’t hurt to tell me what you’re up to. I’m not your damn jailer. I could have given you a little money.”

Danny wasn’t sure what to make of his kindness. Joseph had always tried to remain firm for the boys. They knew that he was fair. But they didn’t dare cross him. He ruled the household with his strict will.

Danny wondered if the adventure had been worth it. He just wanted to sneak out. But everyone was making such a fuss about what had happened. It really ruined the fun.

Tom had his own words for Danny, “You should have taken me along.”

“I didn’t need you playing older brother.”

“An older brother knows a few of the tricks of the trade.”

“Like what, old man?”

Tom had a big smile for him, “Like not getting caught.”

“What are you? Some kind of ghost?”

“You’ll never know!”

They both laughed.

They made a pact to head for the city when Danny was finished with school.

“Will John be OK?”

“He’s always wanted to take care of the farm on his own. It won’t be long before Ricky will be old enough to help.”

“Tom, are you kidding. That may be a long while.”

“Elizabeth can help too.”

“I think that’s the kind of help that he could do without.”

Tom held his tongue. He did want to wish any ill will on his sister. Danny was less concerned about cracking eggs.

“I guess that I learned a lesson for now.”

“Maybe so.”

“I still want you to teach me how to sneak out of here without anyone knowing that you’re gone.”

“That knowledge I’m saving for another time.”

I was glad that Danny had returned. But we wouldn’t have him here forever. This was all part of growing up. At least, that was what I told myself. I was losing too much already. I hated the tragedy of living.

When Danny saw me, he gave me a big hug.

“You heard that I got in trouble.”

“You got off pretty light. I guess Daddy isn’t setting an example.”

“Just remember, Alida, don’t do the things that I do.”

“Are you telling me this as a boy?”

“It’s pretty strange out there.”

I nodded my head.

“I’m still not too old for hugs,” I told him.

Danny looked pale. I wondered if he had even eaten while he was away.

“You need a meal.”

“I’ll be OK. I need to sleep for now.”

I walked him upstairs. I wanted to tell him all about my little friends.

“They haven’t bit you, have they?”

“No, they’re all world class gentlemen.”

“You can’t trust a chipmunk.”

“How do you know that?”

I told him all about the story that I had developed. He even asked me some great questions. But I could see that fatigue was taking over.

“I can’t hang on any longer.”

“See you in the morning, Danny.”

In the morning, he was the first up. He made it to school before any of us had even left. It wasn’t as if he was turning over a new leaf. He simply wanted to be done with the whole mess as soon as possible.

“I’m leaving here on the first train going out,” he joked.

As I continued my adventures with Rex and Caesar, I kept Danny up to date.

“You don’t think that this is a baby game.”

“Not at all.”

“Helen makes fun of me.”

“She just doesn’t know the pleasures of observing nature. She’s too caught up in her movies.”

We both smiled. Danny always spoke his mind. He wasn’t cruel. But he didn’t try to fake it just to be polite.

There was the same honesty in my chipmunks. Caesar and Rex valued the contest. They were becoming thoroughbreds. But Violet had done a great job a getting Man O’ War ready.

We had become part of their lives. What would it be like if we weren’t around? Would they still have their mysteries to preoccupy them. If the chipmunks were indeed spies, that made them seem so much more formidable. Could we teach them like carrier pigeons to carry

messages?

The poor things could never read what we wrote. We could be passing rumors about one of them to another. And he would simply be a dupe. I imagine them all down below in their secret room discussing what we had been writing. They were going to do their best to overthrow their masters. No wonder, we hadn't seen them in a while.

My intrigues became so complicated. I was confusing the others.

"I liked it when we were just racing the chipmunks. Is this what it means to get older? That you don't know how to have fun anymore?"

Ricky was challenging my authority. I guess this was what brought Margaret down. I really had no answers for him. But I did want more than to turn the chipmunks into race horses. I wanted them to talk to us. I wanted to learn more about their lives. Maybe they were just bored heading down those twisted holes of theirs.

The chipmunks remained our friends. But they no longer held the interest that they previously had. I had made them part of a movie. And I balked when they didn't go along with the script. It wasn't so much that they were independent. They just couldn't make sense of the life that I had created for them. It may have had no appeal for them, but it did gratify me.

Even if I had succeeded with the chipmunks, they would have never understood my game. The younger ones couldn't make sense of it either. They had no need for espionage. The world was too transparent for them. At times, Ricky found things suspect. But he didn't look at my parents with the same eye. If they were bored, they bothered one of us to challenge them. My questions couldn't be resolved by someone else. That seemed weird. How had life created these puzzles without an answer. Maybe I wasn't meant to think about things like this. If I brought it up to Helen, she would shrug her shoulders and just look at herself in the mirror.

I could hum a song to myself. I could even listen to music on the radio with my father. But that wasn't what it was about. When Bobby looked at the window, did he wonder what was going on inside our world. Was he just waiting for one of us to come out and play with him?

I'm sure that Elizabeth never wondered about the world in this way. Things were just too perfect for her. She would tell me to put such preposterous ideas out of my head. But I had learned a great deal by observing these wondrous creatures. They were tuned into a magic of the world. But it stopped making sense for me. So it demonstrated to me that there was something in my own life that made no sense. It was as if I was waiting for a great event to explain it all to me. My animal friends had it all in reverse. If there was something troubling, they just waited for it to go away. Bobby didn't take the mystery as a sign of something deeper. He just needed to get to the bottom of it, then he could go back to living his regular life. My regularity had been upset. I watched the animals in the desire that I could figure out what they understood about life that could help me with mine.

I was drawn to the animals because of their serenity. They saw the world in its original harmony. They had never been cast out of Eden. They learned how to accommodate to their surroundings. But I got used to things only to realize that something made no sense about it all. That was why I relied on my older siblings to put things back into place. At the same time, I understood that I was no more satisfied with the picture that they were creating for me. As long as they were around, I didn't have to worry about my own sense of fear. They could chase away the monsters. When I was really by myself, I was not satisfied.

I went outside to play with Bobby. I thought that would get me going. If I was just moving around, I would feel happy. Bobby's energy rubbed off on me. That was the best that I could do for now.

He inspired me to take a walk up to the tracks. There was a desolation that I had never seen before. The tracks told a story about a land where people never slept. They were all the life of the party. I wanted to join this rollicking good time. In movies, I had seen the band strike up a dance number. And everyone had joined in. There was a paradise where people waited for that exuberant moment. I only wanted to hear that glorious music.

When I got back to the house, they were all working to get dinner ready. I worked my way into their midst and started to do my part. At the dinner table, the symphony played itself out. I found joy in my role.. Dinner filled me, and I again forgot about my longing. I took some scraps out to Bobby. He seemed overjoyed to share in our feast.

I wondered what the chipmunks were up to. I wished that they would come if I called. But they needed a more auspicious cue.

There was an art to feeding the chickens. And I loved to gather the eggs. But I didn't enjoy the barn all that much. It wasn't as if I was that bad at milking a cow. But I had none of the skill of John. He was a natural. It was this strange marriage of man and animal that he exemplified. The cows didn't make the milk for humans. But we did what we could to sustain their lifestyle. And they obliged us with the milk. John provided the farm with a needed stability. As a young man, he could do the work of three. It wasn't some kind of competition on his part. Tom and Danny would try to keep up. They weren't made for this kind of work. They had to expend too much effort. John had sculpted himself from mud and straw. He could find a unique concord in the barn.

When he wasn't working, he liked to listen to sports on my father's radio. He could talk about the Montreal Canadiens, or the New York Yankees. He and Danny would discuss the subtleties of the fight game. He could even show him a thing or two. But he was wedded to the land. I learned techniques about the garden. But John knew something special. It took real genius to make anything grow in these parts. Sure the summer would fill the fields with luxurious rows of hay. But this was not wheat country. And you couldn't grow stalks of corn. It reluctantly gave up its plenty. And John knew that each season would only wear him down more. It was a sacrifice to keep things going.

We had a couple of horses to help with the work. My favorite was Diamond. She seemed to have a white diamond on her forehead. I would brush her luxurious brown coat. I wished that she had been bred to race. I would have even enjoyed a show horse. Occasionally, I could ride her around the fields. This was so liberating. I imagined that this was the life that I was meant for.

If John had a gift working with the cows, I wanted to tell myself that I was equally blessed with regards to Diamond. She never tossed me. It was just that she wasn't made for this sort of work. She didn't have the power of an actual race horse.

I would look at pictures of horses in books and magazines in the hope of learning more about their elegance. There was nothing like the sleekness of a true thoroughbred. Nature found the ultimate expression of its vision in the galloping of a totally free horse. Diamond would canter. But it was hard to work her up to gallop. Even if I could enjoy her full effort, we didn't

want to wear her out with my games. She was here to do her job.

Margaret realized what got me headed towards the barn. So I needed to limit my visits. I didn't want her lecturing me about taking advantage of Diamond.

None of the others shared my passion. Helen pretended to have some kind of allergy to horses. She knew how wonderful it looked to be photographed on a horse. But she had never been the kind of rider that I was. So she eschewed the whole lifestyle. She was on the verge of mocking me for my love.

John understood my excitement. And he did what he could to help. He understood even better than my mother the paces that we put Diamond through. He didn't want to cause her to collapse from exhaustion. At the same time, he was aware that horses were made to realize their nature. And a sensitive rider could awaken a spark in the animal. That was why he valued my endeavor. He could see how Diamond perked up when I came around.

"Anyone else, and they would probably get injured by her. But you know what to do to keep her in line."

I may not have been so perceptive with Bobby, but Diamond had a place in my heart. I came alive when she took off in the field.

Riding Diamond would put me in a state. But nothing had the appeal of watching a bird in flight. I wished that Diamond had wings. I loved how a bird would strive to get as high as possible and then just glide in the air. There was such ease in its glorious soaring. I had never ridden on an airplane. But it wasn't at all the same thing. That clunky metal could never match the sheer allure of a bird spreading its wings. Sure, there was something miraculous in man's discovery of the mysteries of flight. But he would never truly know what it was like to get up there on his own power. Those who tried could never attain the summit claimed by the most unassuming bird. All the more breath-taking it was to see a big bird like a hawk in flight. As the feathers spread out, he embraced the sky and rode the currents higher and higher.

My imagination could only call up a weak imitation of the reality experienced by birds. In my dreams, I had achieved my own version of their triumph. I could look down on the farm from the heavens. This was the view to which birds had accustomed themselves. On waking, I had to console myself with the sweet melodies of the morning singers.

What message did they offer to us? I was awe struck by the lovely tune that they used to fill the air. The incessant chirping caught on with the approach of day. They would all call out at once in a magnificent climax. Language was invented to capture this kind of rich interplay that motivated the birds at dawn. They went from a commentary on their own condition to a celebration of the grandeur of the sunrise. That their song could weave together so many threads was motivation enough for human communication to try to capture that same complexity.

They were more than an alarm. As the light burst across the sky, the birds welcomed the onrush of life. My whole being vibrated with the teeming joy. Whether the buzzing of the bees or the sound of the wind blowing in the trees, all the echoes of vitality reverberated everywhere. How could human intention encompass all this activity? I rose to meet the day with this inspiration. I would do what I could to express the complete picture of what surrounded me.

The birds had started a process that would have no end. My walk to school encompassed the full breadth of their melodic gesture. But I needed to fill in the canvas. Our science was our attempt to color the rest of the portrait. Thus, the symphonic hues held sway.

I had viewed such a fantastic image. And I tried to capture its wonder through my school work. But I was more than distracted in my efforts. I had compromised the full impact of my vision. This was something that I would need to reconcile.

The birds never had to deal with the letdown that was so much part of our lives. Poetry originated in a desire to make up for our loss. Our words could accomplish what no other art could. Painting would offer images that spoke of our irretrievable innocence. But our words would provide a more thorough dynamic between image and desire. As the poet embraced the delights of his art, he also spoke to the very imperfections of his depiction. He sought for more. And his irony captured the tension that was at the heart of human existence.

In verse, the robin sang its tune in a land of the imagination. And it rang out with an eternity that exceeded its earthly form. Even as the promise receded from view, the poet's regret invoked a more impressive melody. Such were the treasures of poetry.

The birds had inspired a legacy that filled volume after volume. All this weight was brought into play each morning. And I was a witness to the eloquence. I was hardly the poet of lore. But I did my best to live up to the heritage of greater souls. They were calling me to my own vocation. For me, it would be difficult enough just to escape this place. But I using every available resource to chart my course. Why did I feel so weak in the face of past victories? I needed to do my part.

When I got home from school, Danny was playing with Bobby. Bobby's rapid barks expressed his excitement. I wished that I had Danny's hand with him. The two of them seemed to go at it for hours. I sat and watched them at play. I wanted to learn from Danny.

At dinner time, Danny needed to quit. Bobby seemed sad. He pranced up and down to summon Danny back. His barks were now melancholy wails.

After helping clean up the dishes and after finishing my homework, I had a little while to rest. So much had been happening to me that I needed to catch up with myself. I didn't want to fall asleep as that meant I would probably out for the night. But I could barely keep my eyes open. As I settled off to sleep, I had this image of Danny with Bobby. He tossed a ball, and it seemed to hang in mid-air.

I tried to catch myself. It was time to get up. But my drowsiness took over. I entered a world of dreams. I had an advantage over the others. I could hear what the animals were saying.

I witnessed a planning session between Rex and Caesar. They were going to try to sneak into the house.

"There's food in the pantry. We won't have to waste our effort searching for things."

"They probably have rat traps. And there are cats in there. I don't want to end up as a kitty's dinner."

"Don't worry! I've got it figured out."

"What are you going to do? Poison the cats?"

If they were going to hurt our cats, I needed to warn someone.

I had been ignoring the cats all this time. But they needed my help more than ever.

I spoke to Bobby, "I need your help to keep the chipmunks in line."

"Alida, that's not my job."

"Bobby, what is your job?"

"I'm supposed to guard the house against intruders.":

“Intruders come in all shapes and sizes. Someone is going to have to stop the little mischiefs.”

“Alida, it’s your fault. You gave them big heads. They think that they can do anything.” Bobby was frustrating me.

“Are you going to help? Or do you only listen to Danny?”

“I just don’t think that you like me.”

“What do you want? Do you want to slobber all over me?”

Bobby barked. He didn’t like me insulting him.

When I woke from my nap, everyone had gone to bed. I tiptoed down the stairs in the hopes that I could catch the chipmunks. But there were none to be seen. I saw Nelson, a white house cat saunter into my mother’s bed room. I go some water to drink. Then I went back to bed.

I couldn’t get back to sleep. My dream had sent my mind wandering. And I couldn’t turn it off. It wouldn’t have been permissible to wake someone up to talk to me. I just lay there in the dark and thought about the past few days.

For a while, I really had believed that these little chipmunks were possessed with a special power. My dream confirmed the illusion. This was all about an over-active imagination. I didn’t want to become like Danny. There was some impediment preventing me from becoming the ideal dog trainer. I was just lucky with Rex. And even Violet had proven herself to be much more earnest at teaching her chipmunk. My dream demonstrated that the only way that I could truly satisfy myself with these creatures was if they actually spoke back. But I knew that I would have to wait until the end of time before my friends had the gift of gab. So the game lost some of its interest for me. Besides, my dream told me that the chipmunks were getting ready to betray us. I needed a new distraction.