A LITTLE YELLOW PLANE ADVENTURE



JANE THOMAS WITH ROCHELLE LAMM

Illustrated by SARAH JANE DOCKER

Silver River Shadow

Jane Thomas
with
Rochelle Lamm



BOOKS & BICYCLES

First published in UK, US and Canada in August 2022 by Books & Bicycles Press
EPUB Edition

www.booksandbicycles.com

Text copyright © Jane Thomas 2022 www.jane-thomas.co.uk
Illustration copyright © Sarah Jane Docker 2022 www.sarahjanedocker.com

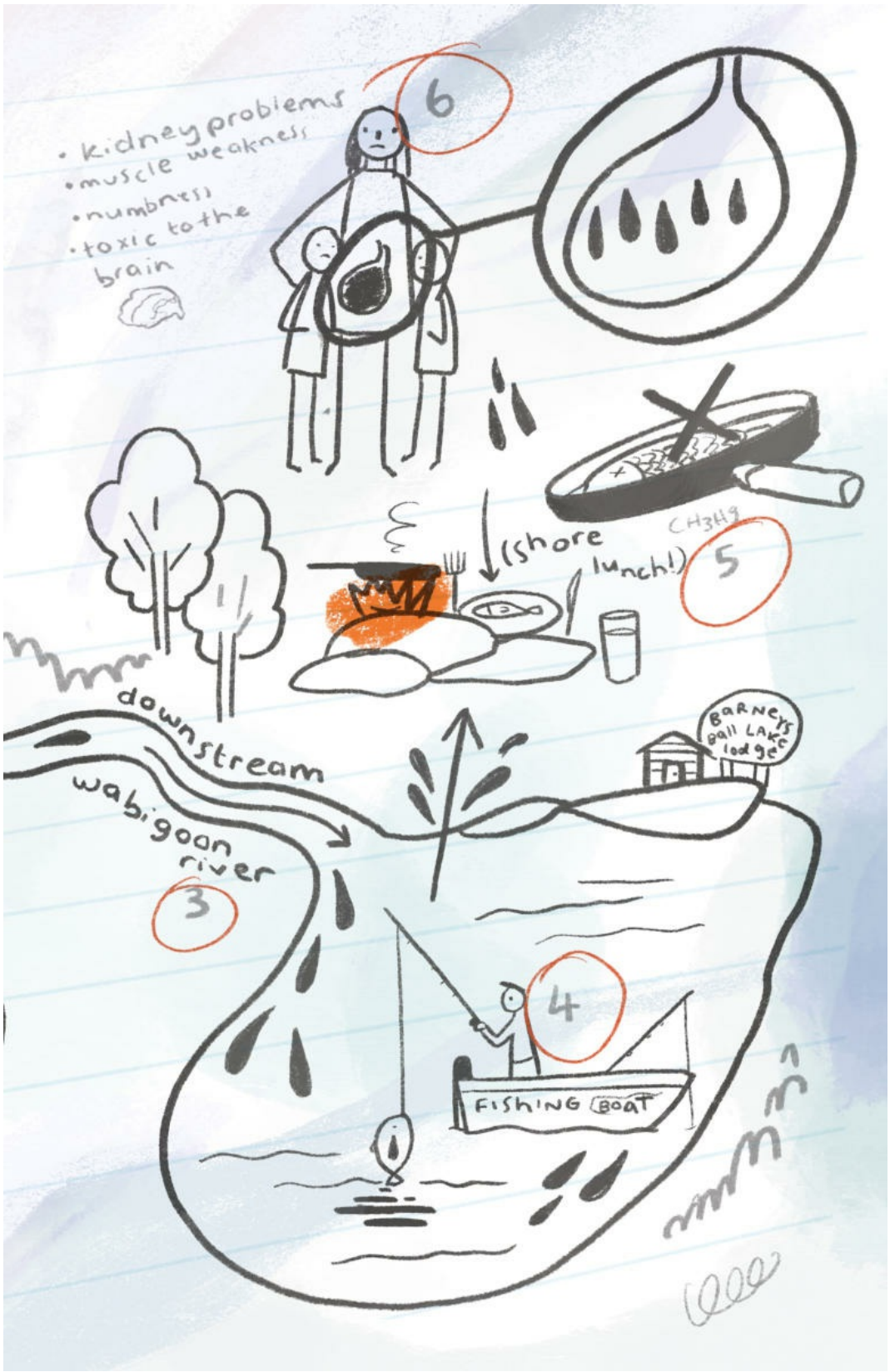
The moral rights of the author and illustrator have been asserted

Produced in conjunction with the Mercury Tragedy Project

All rights reserved
No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher

Paperback ISBN 978 1 8381813 3 8
Ebook ISBN 978 1 8381813 4 5


1950
MERCURY
from barrel to body
by Lizzie
Hg
Dryden chemical company
1
goes into
2
fish eat poisoned algae + plants
LAKES + RIVERBEDS
LAKES + RIVERS
SEAS too!
CH_3Hg


• kidney problems
• muscle weakness
• numbness
• toxic to the brain
6
(shore lunch!)
CH3Hg
5
1
downstream
wabigoon river
3
BARNEY'S PAIL LAKE lodge
4
FISHING BOAT

To the adventurer inside us all

Table of Contents

Cover

Title Page

Copyright Page

Dedication

1. The Beginning of the End

2. Introducing the Attic

3. Finding Friendship

4. By the Light of the Moon

5. Meeting a Whirlwind

6. A Plan Takes Shape

7. Little Lies

8. Finding Firefly

9. The Flowers and the Frog

10. Playing with Fireweed

11. Sums on the Porch

12. Back Home…

13. The World Goes Dark

14. Lift Off

15. The First Meeting

16. A Safe Place

17. The Reunion

18. Highs and Lows

19. The Pact

20. In the End, a New Beginning

I guess you'd like to know which bits are true?

Acknowledgements

November 1865, Oxford, England

Charles Dodgson, later known as Lewis Carroll, sits down to write a story for his friend's niece. He includes a character who becomes popularly known as 'The Mad Hatter'.

June 1950, Minamata, Japan

A little girl sits and watches as a cat with terror-filled eyes runs round and round in a circle, catching her breath as the creature suddenly stops circling and drops to the ground.



CHAPTER 1
THE BEGINNING OF THE END

September 15th, 2021

Lizzie stared out of the classroom window, beyond the playground and up towards the clouds. Perhaps if she wished hard enough they'd get grayer and heavier. Perhaps if she really wanted it to happen, the clouds would club together and form a storm. And somehow that storm might be so awful that it would send bolts of lightning directly onto the school. Maybe one would even set fire to it – no, wait, scratch that, she didn't want anyone to be hurt.

She just really, really didn't want to give her presentation.

It wasn't that she had nothing to say. Lizzie tuned back in to Mary-Anne's speech, a list punctuated regularly by 'and then'. Mary-Anne stared at her paper and didn't dare look above it, at her classmates, which was probably as well since they were all engaged in napping or passing notes or, like Lizzie, staring wistfully at the outside world. Even Miss Andrews looked as if she was clamping her mouth shut against a yawn.

Lizzie would like to bet Miss Andrews was already regretting the summer assignment. She'd always just told them to write a book report during the holidays, and much as some of those were very dull indeed to listen to at least they included magic or fighting dragons or searching for hidden treasure.

"Tell me about your family!" Miss Andrews had said enthusiastically on the last day of school. "Every family has a story to tell. I want to hear yours!"

So far, it turned out nobody had a story to tell at all. The shops in the small, dusty town had been handed down through the generations; the most exciting anecdotes were about when they'd run out of potatoes one winter (or for three days, at least).

The clock ticked loudly. Mary-Anne had stopped and was awkwardly shuffling her papers at the front of the class. Miss Andrews stood up with a too-wide smile and clapped loudly, nodding towards the students to do the same. So everyone joined in, clapping politely, and those who had been dozing on their desks jerked upright and did some extremely enthusiastic clapping in a bid to make up for their absence.

"Who do we have next?" Miss Andrews asked brightly, running her finger down the list. "Aaron? It looks like it's time to hear all about your family!"

Aaron did his best to pretend he hadn't heard but Mary-Anne whacked him on the head with her papers as she sat down. "You're up," she told him.

He went to the front, turned to face the class, and picked a spot high up on the back wall. For the next quarter of an hour, his gaze would bounce between his notes and that spot, never acknowledging the audience.

“My grandmother came to Littleton in 1964. And then she met my grandfather. And then they were married…”.

Lizzie looked back towards the playing field and inwardly screamed “and then” over and over until it became even more meaningless than it already was in the mouths of her classmates. She pulled the carved wooden eagle from her pocket and propped it up on her desk and Bobby, her friend – her only friend – gave her a thumbs up from the far side of the room. He grinned at her and mouthed, ‘I can’t wait!’ before pointing at stammering, monotone Aaron and dramatically crashing back in his chair as if he had quite literally died of boredom.

She pretended to stifle a laugh, although it hadn’t been that funny and was really more than a bit mean. It was hardly Aaron’s fault the most exciting thing in his family’s history was that they’d invented the ‘cronut’ long before it took off in New York. It’s all well and good coming up with ideas, but if you don’t tell the rest of the world it’s very hard for anyone to give you credit for it.

“A portmanteau,” Dad had told her. “When you get two words and mash them together, it’s called a portmanteau. Put together ‘hungry’ and ‘angry’. You get ‘hangry’.”

Thinking of it now, she looked across at Bobby again. And there he was, reaching under his desk to peel back the lid of his lunchbox just far enough that he could slide a few bites of a sandwich into his mouth. That boy was always eating, or thinking about eating, and when he’d been without food for more than an hour… Wow, could he get angry. She wondered how he even made it through the night.

She heard a distant droning sound outside and looked out – out across the playground, out across the trees, and out towards the farthest corners of the horizon, and there in the sky was the Piper Cub. It had to be. Bright yellow, wings stretched out, little wheels reaching down and ready for action. Others heard it, too, and started openly gawping at the tiny plane as it grew larger and larger in the sky, its growing shadow reaching across the field.

Miss Andrews snapped out of her reverie, was about to admonish the children for not even pretending to listen to Aaron, and then caught sight of the plane too.

They all rushed to the windows to get the best view of the plane that was clearly lining up to land along the playground. They shouted and pointed, and Aaron quietly announced, ‘The end’ in the midst of the chaos and joined them all, very glad indeed to have an excuse to get out of the spotlight.

“Dad,” said Lizzie quietly.

“It’s your Dad?” said Mary-Anne, and everyone turned to look at Lizzie who went bright red

and tried to somehow combine staring at the ground and keeping an eye on the plane.

"Um, yeah. It's Dad. He said he'd come for my presentation so… I guess he came."

"In a crazy little plane?"

"It's not crazy. It's a Piper Cub."

"And I've been in it!" said Bobby.

Everyone swung their eyes from Lizzie to Bobby.

"Oh yes," he said airily. "A few times. It's kind of cool. It lands on water, too. When the pontoons are used, of course."

He walked across to Lizzie and smiled at her.

"You just wait till you hear her story," he told the class.

It's hard to say whether they were more surprised by the presence of the plane, the fact that 'coolest kid in the school' Bobby was talking to 'stuck up' Lizzie, or that she had any story at all. But someone opened the fire exit and they all charged outside just as the plane came to a bouncing halt by the long jump pits, so nobody had to decide what was more surprising after all. Miss Andrews tottered after them in her heels, torn between shouting at them to come back inside and wanting to see the plane herself.

Then there he was, Lizzie's dad, striding towards the teacher with his hand outstretched and an apologetic lopsided smile on his face.

"I'm terribly sorry, Miss," he shrugged, spreading his hands wide. "But I did promise Lizzie I wouldn't miss her presentation, and I didn't want to be late."

"That's quite alright," she stammered. Her Teacher Training hadn't covered Random Arrivals By Plane and she was really rather flustered, patting her hair carefully into place and privately wishing she'd re-done her make-up at lunchtime.

She turned to Lizzie, looking her up and down curiously. "Well, then, I suppose we should find out what's so very special about your presentation." She clapped her hands and started to lead the class back inside but Lizzie interrupted her.

"Miss Andrews? Do you think I might do it outside? Under the big oak tree? Please?"

Miss Andrews looked as though she was about to squash that idea but an entire class of children begging, "Please? Oh, please Miss?" is terribly hard to ignore.

And so they went and gathered their jackets and laid them on the grass in a wide circle, and Bobby carried out a chair for Lizzie to sit on and handed her the little wooden eagle that she had forgotten on her desk, and grinned at his friend.

He spoke to the class as he walked over to his jacket and sat down.

"You just wait, guys. You just wait…".


MERCURY CRISIS