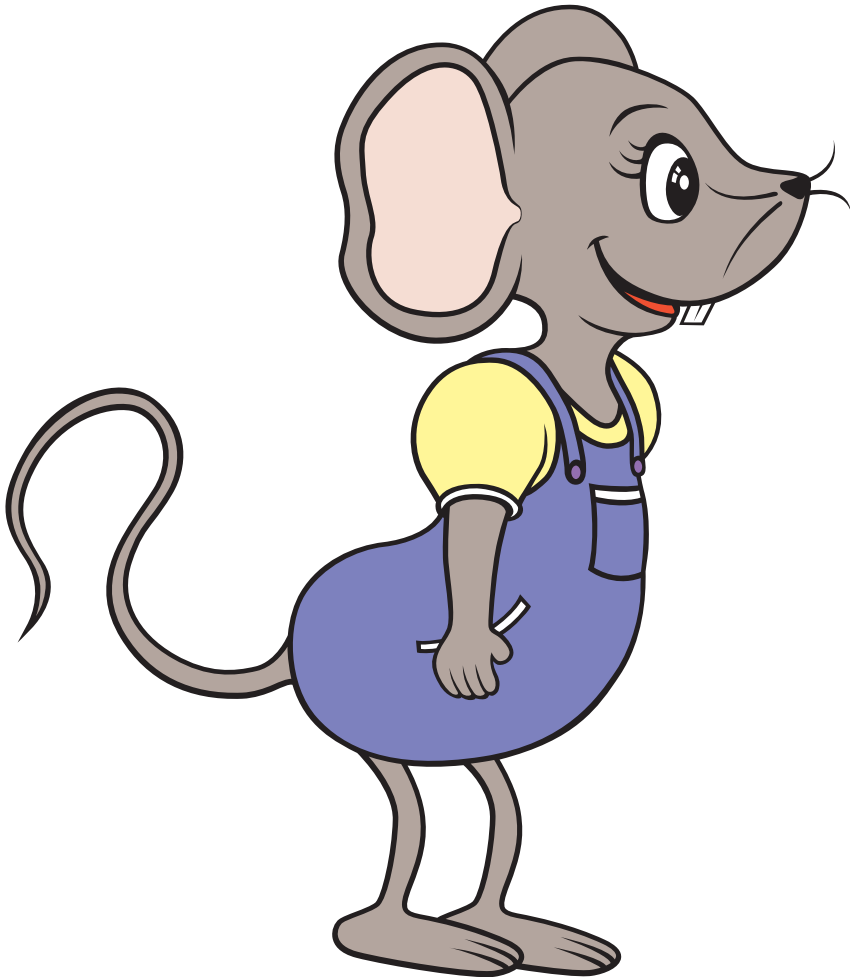


The Little Mouse

Solamae



Linda Cardinal Schneider

The Little Mouse

Solamae

A decorative flourish consisting of two symmetrical, upward-curving lines that meet at a central point, resembling a stylized 'V' or a small bird's tail.

Linda Cardinal Schneider

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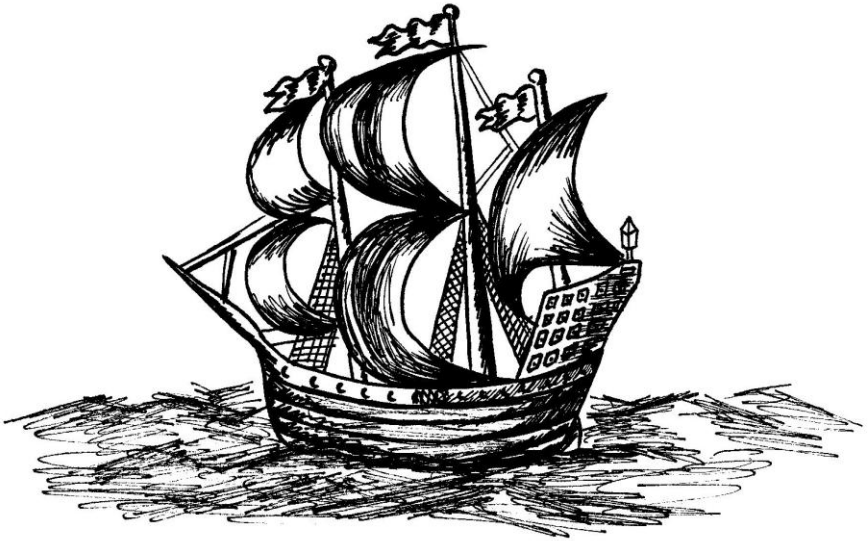
Dedication

**TO ALL THE CHILDREN OF THE WORLD
AND TO THE CHILD IN EACH OF US**

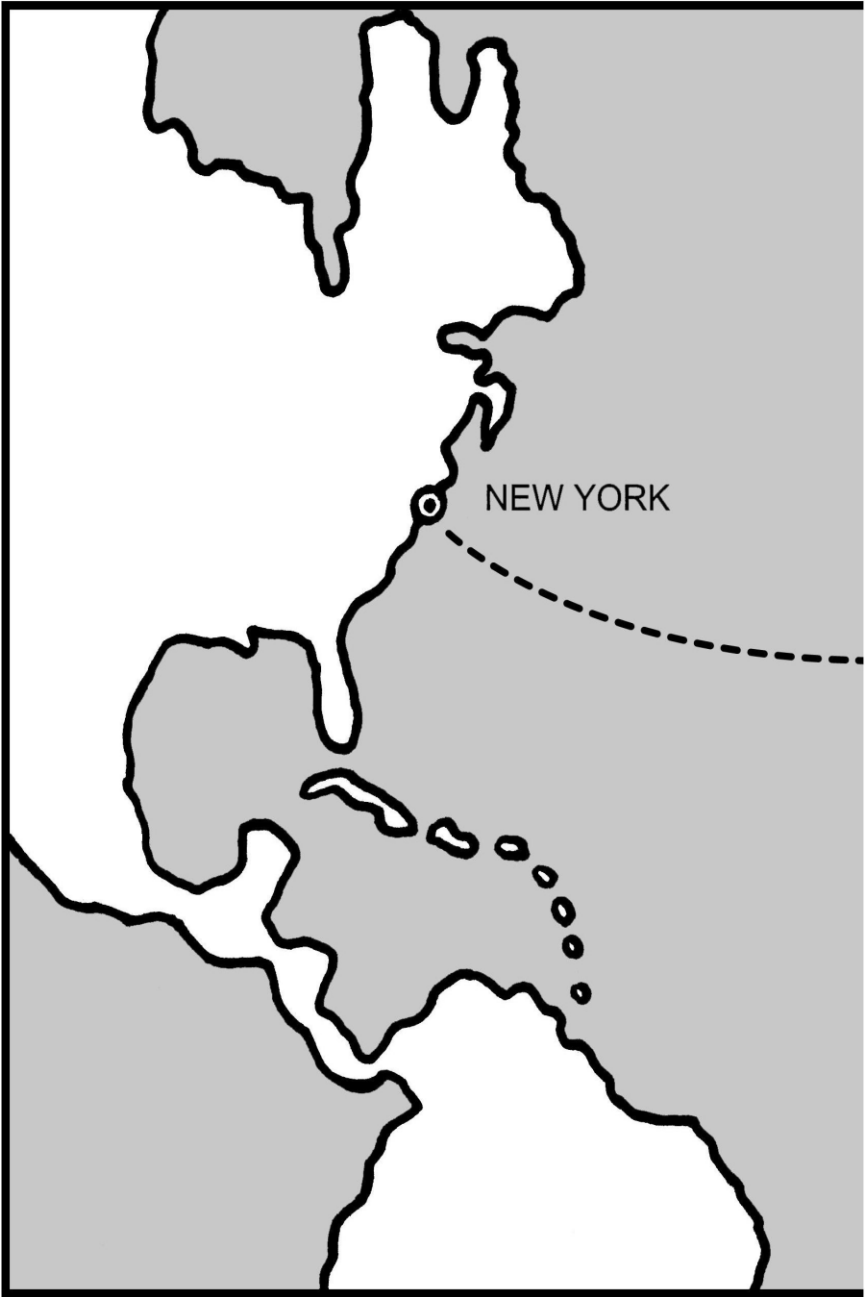
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Volume I



Italy & New York





Introduction

One morning about ten years ago, in a half awake-half sleeping state, the words “The Little Mouse Solamae” came to me. I didn’t know what I was supposed to do with those words. Who was this Solamae and why had she been given to me? What was I supposed to do now that she had skittered into my head? She crawled around in there making herself completely at home and taking her sweet time unfolding her story for me.

Now that I know her very well, I believe she is quite worthy of being introduced to all of you. And that is why I have written her story for her, so that every boy and girl can have the pleasure of getting to know this brave little mouse. Her wonderful, ‘round-the-world adventures, her enduring spirit, and her strength of will to always do the right thing, is guaranteed to be a source of inspiration and entertainment for each of you for many years to come. I invite you to read along as Solamae follows her larger-than-life dreams and as she sweeps others up into believing in themselves.



A Bit of Bacon



The little mouse Solamae wandered the streets and back alleys of the city, trying to find her way back to the palace and the cozy little hole in the wall she had called home; she was lost, hungry, and afraid. She wondered if the palace would be there at all, and what could have happened to her mother and father? She remembered all the confusion and her mother shouting; "Run, Solamae, run!" But she had no idea what could have caused all of the commotion. That was days ago, and now she was so tired. Her stomach was pleading with her for the succulent morsels her mother would gather for her; leftovers from the splendid feasts prepared in the great kitchens at the palace. She remembered her father's promise always to be there to take care of her. Where was he now... and why had he broken his promise to her?

The Little Mouse Solamae

It was almost dawn of the third day when she found herself at the wharf. There were three ships docked there and Solamae tried to decide which one would be carrying a cargo of food. No one was stirring, but she was sure she could smell the aroma of bacon cooking! She rubbed her sleepy eyes and strained to see if anyone was moving about. Looking hard, Solamae saw a faint light on the wooden ship at the end of the dock. The light was coming from below, but it streamed out across the deck of the ship, and she could tell it was a sailing vessel. *Maybe I could ask the cook for just one little bit of bacon,* she thought to herself.

Without hesitating, Solamae jumped onto the ship and ran toward the light. Letting her nose lead the way, she ran across the deck and down three ladders, until she was so close to the delicious bacon smell that she could almost taste it. Around and around she went, getting nearer and nearer to the source of the wonderful aroma. Finally, Solamae found the galley. The table was set at each place with only a tin plate, a fork, and a tin cup. Never had she seen a table set so sparsely. *These sailors*



must be very poor, thought Solamae. But, where was that good smell coming from?

Standing on her tiptoes, she peered into the oven. There she could see a big pan of bacon, just waiting for the ship's crew to wake up and enjoy. Solamae thought longingly to herself, *I wish the cook would come back so that I could ask for just one piece*, not forgetting that she had been taught never to steal. Anyway, opening the oven door all by herself would be simply impossible!

Then, as though by a miracle, Solamae saw a strip of bacon through the corner of her eye. It was lying right there at her feet. It must have fallen off the platter as it was going back into the oven to keep it warm. *This must have been meant for me*, Solamae decided. Suddenly, her father's promise always to provide for her did not seem so farfetched.

Solamae dined on crisp bacon until her stomach couldn't hold any more. Fat and happy, she fell immediately asleep in a comfy corner of the galley. She knew indeed that that somehow she was being watched over.

A Mother's Love



Solamae slept until late the next morning. The sailors had come and gone for their meals four times by then. Not one of them noticed little Solamae sleeping in the corner. She was so worn out that she hadn't noticed them either. She had been dreaming contentedly of her mother's love. Mother had always told her that she was destined to be great. Solamae awoke to the gentle rocking of the ship and her first thoughts were of her dilemma. *But how can I be anything now? I have nothing and no one to help me.*

Just then, Solamae remembered how the bacon had miraculously appeared seemingly out of nowhere. *I have to make it; I won't disappoint my mother*, thought the plucky little mouse. Solamae had gotten her courage



back just in time. She realized with a rush that the ship was rocking! As Solamae tried to walk with the floor moving under her feet, she wasn't so sure she would make it.

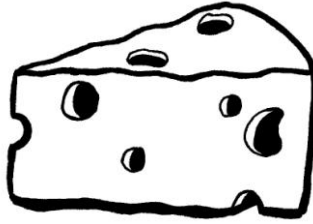
The brave little mouse stumbled her way up three ladders to the deck of the sailboat, but when the ship hit a wave, she went sliding across the deck and grabbed onto the railing seconds before reaching the edge! The sailors were walking about as though nothing were amiss. *Why couldn't I do that?* thought Solamae. *I've got to get my sea legs before I fall overboard and drown!* She scooted towards the ladder, afraid to try to stand up because she was so close to the edge, but the closer she got to the ladder the braver she became, and before you know it, Solamae was walking almost normally. Like the sailors, Solamae had learned to let her knees bend as the waves rose, giving her legs over to the sea. *What else will this Great Sea teach me?* She wondered.

Suddenly, Solamae thought of the Great Adventure that she felt lay ahead of her. She looked out over the vast sea. *I have no idea where I am going;*

nobody even knows I'm here. Well...maybe that's best for now. Yesterday wasn't so bad; surely, there are some other mice here that I could be friends with. She was pleased with the accommodations so far, and nobody was trying to sweep her out with a broom, just as the stingy cheese shop owner had done in the city. Building up her courage once again, Solamae decided to make the best of her dilemma, and that changed everything for the brave little mouse. *Who knows? She thought, maybe this could be a wonderful opportunity for me.*



The Big Mouse



Later that day, after Solamae had made her way back down to the cozy galley, she found a wonderful piece of cheese waiting just for her. “Thank you,” she said, remembering that she was being watched over. Then she ate the whole thing. She rested from her great adventure, pleased with herself and her new outlook.

Solamae slept the rest of the day. Her tummy had not been this happy since she left the palace. Now she was wide-awake while everyone else was asleep! *Well...this might be a good time to take a look around.* She was full of energy and curiosity, so she decided to go below. It was very dark and quiet; the ship was not rocking at all now. Solamae wandered around, not understanding anything she saw, *I wonder what all these big ropes are for*, she marveled to herself. She made her

way to a room full of burlap sacks that were stacked up to the ceiling; *I wonder what this could be?*

Solamae thought she smelled something familiar, but she couldn't tell where the smell was coming from. She looked and looked among the burlap sacks until she came to the bottom of the pile. Then she noticed a little pathway. "Hmm," she muttered, "this looks like a mouse path. We had these at the palace. I'll bet there are other mice here!" Solamae followed the pathway, getting closer and closer to the wonderful smell with each step. "Mmm...It smells like home."

All of a sudden, Solamae heard a big commotion; just like that night at the palace. She could hear someone shouting her mother's words... "Run, run, and hide, someone is coming!" Just then, Solamae came face to face with a really big mouse! She wasn't afraid, because he reminded Solamae of her father. The big mouse's eyebrows knitted together just like her father's did when he was concerned about something. "What do you want?" he asked firmly. "What are you looking for?" Solamae didn't know what to think. "I'm not looking for



anything in particular,” Solamae answered. The big mouse was becoming annoyed with her; she seemed too quiet, “Where did you come from?” he demanded of her.

Solamae proceeded to tell the big mouse all that had happened to her in the last week. Then, just when she started her tale about the palace, he interrupted her. “I know all about that, and you’re not so quiet after all!” Seeing that Solamae meant no harm, the big mouse finally invited her to join him and his family in their home. Solamae wasn’t so sure about that. She had never been to someone else’s home before. “Oh...I hope I can remember my good manners.” Solamae thought about how lonesome she had been and she decided to accept the invitation. “O.K.,” she finally agreed.

Plenty



Solamae had been living with the big mouse and his lovely family for one whole month now. It was a cozy little hole in the wall, just like her home at the palace. They spent their time relaxing and talking about their pasts, remembering, and remarking. It took Solamae by surprise to learn that the big mouse actually knew her father and her mother. “But that was a long time ago,” the big mouse would say every time Solamae would ask about her father and mother. It was driving her crazy, but even so, she kept asking and asking, but to no avail.

Solamae had gotten to know the big mouse’s whole family by now. There was Mrs. Big, she was plump and happy, and she liked Solamae so very much. Then there were all the little Bigs, all of whom had become playmates of Solamae’s by this time. Ustabe Big was the eldest and the nosiest of all the Big children and



Pee Wee Big was the littlest. In between there was Mighty, Teeny, Minnie, and Wanabe Big. All together, counting Solamae, there were now seven little Bigs.

Each one of the little Bigs was different: Ustabe had a big nose, Pee Wee wore glasses, Mighty had big brown eyes, Teeny had big blue eyes, Minnie had tiny little feet, while Wanabe's feet were gigantic. Then there was Solamae, with her mysterious smile.

One by one, the little Bigs would tell Solamae stories about their travels. Pee Wee taught Solamae some new games that he had learned from spying on the sailors, and Mighty taught Solamae the things he had learned by watching the sailors do their work on the ship. Mighty Big could tie one hundred different knots; he taught Solamae how to tie them all.

Sometimes the little Bigs would tease Solamae about one thing or another, and she would say, "Listen! God doesn't care that I'm different from you. He made me the way he wanted me to be, and now it's up to me to use what He gave me and to serve His children." Solamae could hardly believe she had said that, having

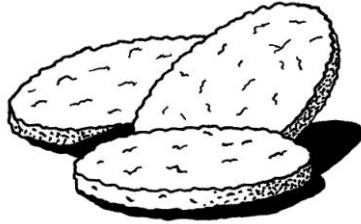
The Little Mouse Solamae

no idea where those words had come from. Then Solamae would simply smile mysteriously. Even when they had their little arguments, Solamae could tell how much all of the Bigs loved her.

Solamae had grown comfortable and secure with the Bigs. She liked being accepted as a family member. She felt safe and happy, and she was learning a lot from her new friends. Her bravery had led her to a new life as a sailor; she was happy to stay with the Bigs. The one thing Solamae could be sure of was how much all of the Bigs loved her and, for now, that was enough for the brave little mouse.



Provisions



Life was very easy there with the Bigs. There was plenty to eat and very good company to share. Solamae had become preoccupied with having fun. She had forgotten all about the grand adventure that had seemed to await her. Now it was time to get ready for a change.

According to Mr. Big, “Provisions are being made for going ashore.” Solamae didn’t know what that meant, so she asked the little Bigs to tell her what “Going Ashore” meant. Pee Wee Big, the littlest of the Bigs, was the first to speak up. “Our mother packs us a knapsack full of provisions! Our mother bakes us special Joe Frogger cookies! Our mother wraps the special cookies up in pretty papers and puts them into our knapsacks. Those are our provisions.” Solamae thought for a long time about what Pee Wee Big had said. She understood

that these were special cookies, but how special could they be? And why do we have to take them ashore?

Just then, Mrs. Big came into the room. She had overheard Solamae worrying about going ashore. Mrs. Big asked the little Bigs to leave the room so that she could talk to Solamae alone. “The special thing about the cookies that I packed for you is that they are baked with molasses and they stay fresh a long, long time.” Solamae knew immediately that this meant she was going to be gone for a long, long time. Just thinking about this made her pout. “Remember what your mother told you,” said Mrs. Big as she walked into the hallway where the little Bigs were laughing and squealing about “Joe Frogger” cookies.



The Beanies



Solamae had been walking all day, and thinking about how she and the little Bigs had been hurried off the ship by Mr. and Mrs. Big, with hardly a word..." GOOD LUCK" is all they called out. Then, they and the ship sailed away. *Well then...*thought Solamae, *I will just have to figure out all of this by myself.* Each of the little Bigs had gone off in a different direction when they went ashore. So, on a whim, Solamae chose to go up a hill. Now, at the end of the day, she realized it was really rather more like a mountain! *I'd better stop, right here...and, and...* Solamae didn't know what to do. It was getting dark, and there she was trying to climb a

mountain! She was so confused. She just sat down and was quiet for a moment. Then, she remembered the Joe Froggers.

While devouring these treats and all their crumbs, she marveled at how good they were and how much care Mrs. Big had put into them. Solamae decided that she would have to have a plan, and she wondered just what that plan should be? How could she get the answer to that? Just then, there was a twinkle way up in the trees. Solamae heard her father's voice as clear as a bell! She knew immediately that all she had to do was lay her head down and go to sleep, and she would be fine in the end.

In the morning, the birds were chirping and everything seemed peaceful, but Solamae could hear something walking through the leaves. The sound was becoming clearer, and, whatever it was, it was getting closer! Solamae decided not to be afraid. Instead, she got up and brushed herself off, and then she went to meet whatever it was that was coming. She had only taken a few steps when she came face to face with a cute little boy! He looked nice in his clean denim overalls, and



Solamae decided that he must be a farm boy, so she liked him right away. He had a round face with rosy cheeks, and big brown eyes full of happiness. She smiled her prettiest smile. They quickly became best friends and soon they would become very valuable to one another.

Solamae wanted to give her new friend a gift, and she thought of the special Joe Frogger cookies, which were her only possessions, and turned out to be the perfect choice. She soon learned everything about her new friend. His name was Alfredo Benimino. His friends and family called him Alfredo Benimino. This was quite a lot for Solamae to pronounce, so she secretly referred to Alfredo as “Beanie,” and to all his many family members, as “the Beanies.” It sounded safe at the Beanies’ so Solamae decided to accept her new friend’s invitation to his home, and off they went, up the mountainside.

The Owl & The Fox



On their way up the mountain, Alfredo introduced Solamae to his two friends; a spotted owl with big dark eyes and a red fox with a long bushy tail tipped in white and with black, pointed ears. The owl was very wise and shared his wisdom freely. The fox on the other hand, had his own agenda. He remained aloof, and allowed Solamae to come to her own conclusions about his sly and wily behavior.

Solamae would learn many valuable lessons from these two new friends. All the way up the mountainside, Alfredo was chattering. He seemed so eager to share his life with Solamae his family and his friends, and his interesting experiences. Solamae wondered if he had



been lonely before she arrived, but that didn't make any sense because, after the way he spoke about it, his life seemed very, very blessed. Solamae was just glad that Alfredo wanted to be her friend, and she decided not to question her good fortune. Besides, she was getting a little nervous about going to someone else's home again, and hoping she would not startle them as much as she had startled the Bigs.

The Beanies turned out to be a wonderful Italian family, grape farmers, and wine makers of the first order. Their wonderful wine was famous all over Italy and, because of its limited production it commanded a very high price. This, in turn, provided the Beanies with a luxurious lifestyle. They had a swimming pool as large as the one Solamae remembered at the palace, and they were constantly entertaining friends and family members. Solamae had a great time at the Beanies' house. Every day seemed like a vacation.

A Piece of Gold



Life with the Beanies. Oh, what a pleasure! Solamae's favorite times were the hikes that she and Beanie would take through the woods and trails, over the streams, and deep into the forest. Often, they would meet up with Beanie's friends the owl, and the fox. As it would turn out, they had a lot to teach him and Solamae.

One fall day, while gathering pretty leaves that had drifted to the ground, Solamae saw a bright gold object half buried in the earth. She called to Beanie, but he had stopped earlier to get a drink from the stream and hadn't caught back up to her yet. Just then, the owl flew down and asked Solamae, "What's frightening you?" Solamae thought for a long time. "Well... I don't know, but well...what if...?" Suddenly, the Fox appeared out of nowhere and asked, "Are you afraid you have found a



great treasure?” “No,” Solamae exclaimed, “Why would I be afraid of that?”

The Fox asked Solamae to imagine that the shiny object was worth millions of dollars and that she could go anywhere and have anything in the world. Her imagination took her soaring off to a land of plenty where all the people that she loved waited for her with big smiles and open arms. But her good friend Beanie, the owl, and the fox that she had so grown to love and to depend on were nowhere to be found. “What if it’s just Fool’s Gold?” The fox was taunting her now. “I don’t care what it is!” Solamae was defiant, “I wasn’t expecting to find anything but pretty leaves, and I have plenty of them.” Solamae had grown comfortable and secure with the Beanies. She liked being accepted as a family member, and she was not ready to give that up.

While the wise old owl was congratulating Solamae, Beanie came whistling up the path. “Look what I found, Beanie!” Solamae could hardly wait to show the pretty leaves to her dear friend. She kicked some dirt

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over the shiny object, then she and Beanie headed for home, without worrying over any ole gold.

Solamae would wait for another day to take up her adventure again. She felt safe and happy for now, and she was learning a lot from her three new friends. Besides, she was much too curious to leave just yet; Solamae had overheard the Beanies whispering about a new baby they were expecting!



The Great Goddess



The next day was cloudy and cold. Winter was setting in early, and the two friends decided to stay at home where it was cozy and warm. Besides, there was excitement in the air, just like before a party or a very big celebration. The whole family had gathered around the fireplace. One at a time, each of them in turn would say a name. This went on for several hours. Solamae wondered if it was a game and asked if she and Beanie could join in. “All right, but remember, we need a name that has never been used before; a name suitable for a goddess.” Solamae immediately thought of a name that she had dreamed up for her imaginary friend back at the palace. No one but her knew this friend, so she was sure the

name would do. She blurted out “Johari,” and then she added, “THE GREAT GODDESS JOHARI!

The family was thrilled. Finally, a name fit for a goddess. They could not thank Solamae enough for honoring their new baby girl with such a beautiful title. Then they told her the legend of the wine goddess. Long before grape farming had become popular; one wealthy king ruled all the land. The people of the land disliked His Meanness and they longed for freedom from him, but they had no way to earn a living on their own. His Meanness controlled all the riches in the area and gave them only enough to survive on day by day. The King’s daughters were very cruel, and he had no sons to carry on his name. The only hope the king had was to trick an unsuspecting soldier who might be passing through into marrying one of his mean daughters and giving him a grandson.

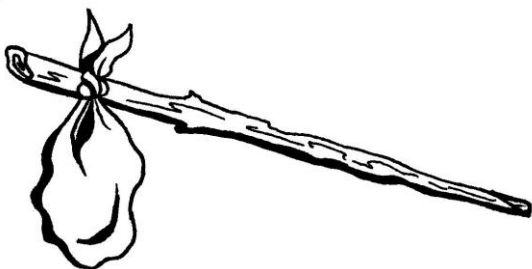
The King went to great extremes to snare a husband for his daughters. One day, he gave a feast in tribute to the most beautiful goddess in the land. He invited everyone for miles around. Young soldiers



dreamed of the beauty of this goddess and offered to lay down their lives for only one moment with her. The daughters were so cruel to them that, one by one, the disappointed soldiers went away.

The King died without producing an heir, so the people of the land were finally free to farm the rich earth for themselves. It was not long before they became expert wine makers, and the legend of the beautiful wine goddess lived on. Now, each time a new baby girl is born, the villagers take the greatest care to select a name fit for a goddess.

Time to Go



Beanie and Solamae spent the whole winter inside playing with the little Goddess Johari. She had grown so fast and so pretty. The two friends took special care of her and protected her from all harm. Now that the winter had passed, Solamae thought of their friends the fox and the owl. “Beanie, don’t you think we should go to greet them when they awake from their long winter’s nap? I am sure they will be hungry. Let’s bring them some provisions. I can pack my knapsack for them and we can introduce them to your new sister, O.K.?”

Without waiting for a reply from Beanie, Solamae began making her preparations. She found her knapsack in a second although she hadn’t thought of it since arriving at the Beanies. To her surprise, there were still several uneaten cookies inside! “Come on, let’s go.



Hurry up! They'll be so happy to see us after such a long time."

They were indeed glad and hungry! The fox and the owl ate three cookies each before stopping to comment on how special they were. Solamae had almost forgotten all the care Mrs. Big had taken with those cookies. The spunky little mouse proceeded to tell them the whole story about what made those cookies so special, when the fox interrupted her. "We know about these cookies, and we know about the lady who made them" Solamae was shocked! Then the owl said, "Yes, we do know. She misses you, and so do all the little Bigs!" Solamae couldn't understand; how could the fox and the owl know so much? Mrs. Big said these cookies were special, but...?

Solamae thought for a long time, "Should I go and look for the ship? I know Beanie isn't lonely any longer, and you two certainly can take care of yourselves!" She was counting on their wisdom and for knowing the right thing to do, but she knew in her heart that she had to let the Bigs know that she was all right and to get any news

they might have about her family. Being with the Beanies had been wonderful, but she couldn't forget about her own adventure.



A Goodbye Present



Early the next morning, Solamae and Beanie set out toward the place where they had first met. Beanie was jabbering the whole way, and it gave Solamae time to think about how much she loved him and how she would miss him and all the Beanies, especially Goddess Johari, the fox, and the owl. Suddenly, Solamae wasn't so sure she was doing the right thing. Then she thought about the day she found that shiny object, half buried in the dirt. She thought about what the fox had said to her that day. "What if it's just Fool's Gold?" Then she thought about all the people that she loved who were waiting for her with big smiles and open arms. Just about then, they arrived at the lucky place, the spot where they first met.

Beanie had stopped talking; he was sad because he knew that Solamae did not have any idea where she was going. He knew that they would have to part at that spot, so he started jabbering again! “Solamae, try going back the way you came, maybe you can find the ship that the Bigs were on. If you cannot find them, please, please, PUL...LEEZE, promise me you’ll come back to the mountain top.” Solamae was unable to comfort Beanie or make him stop worrying, so she just kissed him and thanked him profusely for the wonderful time she had at his home. Then, the brave little mouse took off down the mountain!

In a flash, Beanie reappeared carrying a bundle and jabbering about a forgotten present intended for Solamae. Beanie had it wrapped up in his jacket, and it was squealing! “Wait, wait, Solamae, I forgot. I have something important for you!” Beanie was very excited and he pushed the jacket into Solamae’s arms. *What in the world?* Solamae wondered, *what was in Beanie’s jacket that had him sooooo excited he could hardly speak?*



It was a puppy! Beanie continued jabbering, and now Solamae was listening very intently to every word. “Solamae, may I introduce you to Puppino. Puppino may I introduce you to Solamae.” Then Beanie started to instruct them both; “Puppino you are to be a good friend, companion, and protector to Solamae, just as your father, Poky, has been to me. Solamae, you are to allow Puppino to lead, guide, and protect you. When you are blue, you must let Puppino cheer you up with her clowning and her antics. Oh, and please don’t pet her hind quarters, she really doesn’t like that.” All this was said while Puppino was briskly licking Solamae’s face, and they both happily agreed, “O.K!”

Now, things were different. Solamae was not alone anymore and she didn’t have to make all the important decisions by herself. Puppino was there to help her and to make her feel safe. Solamae slept better knowing that Puppino would hear any slightest noise, sense the slightest danger, and immediately lead her away from it. Another thing Solamae loved about Puppino was that she could count on the pup to be there in the morning when

she awoke. In fact, Solamae could count on Puppino to be right by her side (except for an occasional hunting trip) from now on! This made Puppino very happy too, for all the same reasons. And so, the two of them went bouncing down the mountainside, eager for the adventures that lay ahead of them.



A Foggy Night



Solamae and her new friend, Puppino, had bounded all the way down to the seashore without even stopping for a drink! Now they were thirsty, hungry, and tired. It was getting dark, and they both knew that they would need to find a safe place to spend the night; but where? Puppino had never been to the seashore, she was just a small puppy, but she didn't know that. Puppino thought she was a giant! She never showed any fear. "Let's go to the wharf, where all the big ships are," Solamae said. Of course, Puppino agreed right away. This was familiar territory, and she could teach Puppino how to walk on the deck of the ship without falling off

into the sea. “Let’s go!” Solamae exclaimed happily. And off they went.

Now, it was dark and dreary. Neither Solamae nor Puppino could see past their noses in front of their faces because of the thick fog that was rolling in. Solamae was lost. “Which way do we go? What do we do?” Puppino just comforted her and said, “Don’t worry, Solamae, I have a good nose even if I can’t see it right now. It will lead us the way. Follow me!” She let Solamae hold on to her tail as she sniffed her way toward the ships.

Once they got to the wharf, they realized that no matter how good Puppino’s nose was, they still could not see the ships. Both Solamae and Puppino squinted their eyes, straining to make out the large forms in the fog. Nothing helped, they could not see! Suddenly, Puppino shouted, “I smell bacon!” It turned out that Puppino did have a very good nose. “I smell it too!” Solamae added, “Can you follow the smell, Puppy?” Puppino just laughed, “Of course, grab on to my tail, let’s go, let’s go!” Puppy was in a hurry now. Bacon was her favorite treat.



As they approached the ship, a dim light was visible through the fog. It streamed out across the deck of the ship, the same way it had before. Solamae could not tell if it was a sailing vessel or not, but decided it was worth a try. “Let’s jump aboard, Puppy. There has to be some bacon down in the galley, like the last time I was here.” Puppino didn’t hesitate a moment, “O.K. Let’s jump!”

Trust



Now that Solamae and Puppino were safely on the deck of the ship, Solamae realized that she was in charge of protecting her new friend. The fog was lifting and the sea was already starting to get rough. Puppino was lying down on her stomach. She couldn't stand up because the waves were rocking the ship. Solamae took Puppino by the tail and said, "Don't be afraid, Puppy, you can do it. I will hold on to you so that you won't fall overboard. This is how I learned, too. Just let your knees bend when the wave rises. Give your legs to the sea. The sea will give them back, every time, when the wave goes back down."

Puppy was trying not to be frightened, but the ground had never moved under her before, and she just didn't know what to make of it. "Solamae, why is the ground moving?" Puppy cried out. "Because we are not




on the ground anymore! We're sailors now. Yip-Pee!" Solamae rejoiced. When Puppy heard how happy Solamae was about the situation, she stood right up, trusting her friend to hold on to her tail until she could get her sea legs adjusted. This was an important lesson that Puppy would never forget, and that was how to trust, especially when you are doing something for the very first time.

Now that everyone was up on all fours, they remembered how hungry they were. They had eaten the last of Mrs. Big's cookies before heading down the mountain, but that was hours ago. Solamae worried that it might be impossible for Puppy to make it down those steep ladders into the galley where they might find some food. "Do you want to wait here while I go look for something for us to eat, Puppy?" "No, I do not." Puppy said indignantly. "I trust you to show me how to manage these ladders." This pleased Solamae very much, and she could clearly see how important she and Puppy had become to each other. "I won't let anything bad happen to you, Puppy." "Neither will I let anything bad happen

to you, Solamae,” Puppy replied. They both loved each other, and they always would.

Getting down the first ladder was a little tricky. Solamae thought Puppino was going to flip her hindquarters over her head and go tumbling down to the bottom. “Slow down, Puppy!” cautioned Solamae. But Puppy kept going faster and faster, as she gained more confidence, and she beat Solamae down to the galley! When Solamae caught up to her, Puppy was already gnawing on a big beef bone she had found lying on the floor; “Is there any meat on that bone? Can I have some too?” They both ate quickly and when they were full, they immediately set off to find the Bigs.



A Mouse's House



Solamae knew just where to look for the Bigs. She led Puppy down to the belly of the ship, past the place where all the ropes were stored and into the room where the burlap sacks were the last time she was there. When they arrived, Solamae exclaimed, “Oh, No! We must be on the wrong ship, Puppy.” The room was now empty and there was no mouse path to follow to find the Bigs. Then she remembered Puppy’s nose. Solamae described to Puppy the wonderful smell of a mouse’s house. She told Puppy to look for a little entranceway, and that it would be hidden behind some burlap. “No problem,” Puppy said and she began sniffing along the floor, around and around the room in a widening circle until she was up against the bulkhead of the room. “I smell molasses,”

Puppy shouted. “That’s it! Mrs. Big must be baking Joe Froggers. Now how do we get in?”

Solamae was worried because she could hear someone crying. “Something’s wrong, Puppy, no one ever cries at the Big’s house. They are usually so happy.” Just then, they both saw the opening in the bulkhead and they squeezed through it. They were out of breath, but so happy to have found the Bigs that they didn’t notice all the commotion at first. Once they caught their breath Solamae called out, “What’s wrong?” She was trying to get everyone’s attention.

When everyone realized Solamae was back, they all stopped crying because they were so happy to see her and to meet Puppino. But Solamae could tell that something wasn’t right. “Did everybody just get back from going ashore?” Solamae inquired. “No, not everybody,” Mrs. Big replied. By now, she was really upset.

Solamae counted heads as she introduced Puppy to all the Bigs. All except... “Where is Pee Wee? she cried. And Mr. Big, where is he?” Mrs. Big was crying so



hard that she could not speak. Ustabe, the eldest of the Big children, tried to explain. “Six months ago when we all went ashore, Pee Wee decided to take up flying. He always dreamed about flying. We don’t know why, but this time he really did it.” “Did what?” Solamae asked. “He flew!” cried Ustabe, “and we don’t know where...or if he will ever come back.” Now they were all crying: Ustabe, Mrs. Big, and all the little Big’s except Pee Wee Big, of course. He was missing! And so was the biggest Big. “Well, where did Mr. Big go?” Solamae asked softly, but no one answered because no one had heard the question over all the loud weeping.

Solamae and Puppino put their heads together to try to figure out what they could do about the situation. It seemed like such a “big” problem and they just didn’t know what they could possibly do about it. Neither one of them knew how to fly. And even if they did, how would they ever figure it out where Pee Wee could have flown off to? Where could Mr. Big have gone to search for Pee Wee? And where would she and the pup go to look for the two of them? Solamae felt sad and helpless.

The Little Mouse Solamae

But I'm just a little mouse, and I am lost as well. Then, she remembered what her Mother had told her so long ago; “Solamae, one day you will do great things,” and she promised herself that she would think of something she could do to help.



The Answered Prayer



It was the middle of the night now, and Solamae and Puppino were still not sure what they were going to do about finding Pee Wee and Mr. Big. Before bedtime, they had reassured the family that they would think of something by the next morning. They were no closer to a solution, and worse yet, morning was quickly dawning. Solamae had requested that the family join together in a prayer; and she had asked that the answer come to her in a dream. Since neither of them had slept a wink all night, it was unlikely that the answer would come to them in that form.

“I hear someone stirring, Solamae,” Puppy whispered. Solamae replied, “I hear it too! Who could it be?” Before Puppy could answer, someone came walking down the hallway and into the living room. “Who’s there?” Solamae cried out. “It’s me, Pee Wee! Pee Wee Big!” And there he was. He was wearing a pilot’s jacket and he was covered in wet snow! Mr. Big was holding his hand and walking with him. They were both laughing and they seemed quite all right! Mr. Big proudly announced, “We’ve been on the snowy peak on the mountaintop.”

Just then, Solamae heard Puppino calling her. “Wake up Solamae, it’s dawn and we must go find Pee Wee.” They had both been so tired that they had fallen fast asleep, in spite of all their worrying.

Solamae’s prayer had been answered; she scribbled a note to the family before they left. It read, “Don’t worry. I’m certain that Pee Wee and Mr. Big are quite all right! Puppy and I will be back with them before we set sail tomorrow.” Then off they went, back up the mountain to the snowy peak that had appeared in



Solamae's dream, but not before grabbing some freshly baked Joe Frogger Cookies for Pee Wee and Mr. Big. "They will be very hungry and so will we, Puppy!"

On their way back up the mountain, Solamae told Puppy what she thought might have happened. "I think Pee Wee must have run out of gas, and he must have had to parachute to safety. I think that Mr. Big must have finally found Pee Wee, but they probably got lost on the way back. Now, both of them are lost and hungry, but I know just where they are. We'll lead them back in time to set sail tomorrow. Thanks Puppy!"

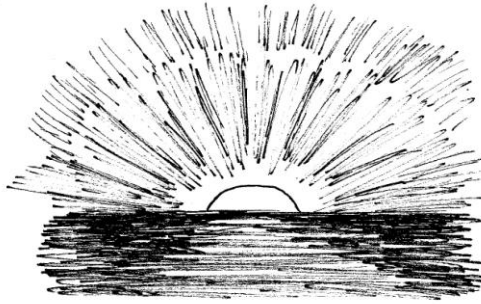
Puppino had stopped to gobble up a cookie. She really couldn't take any credit; all she had done was to wake Solamae up. It was Solamae's prayer that would lead them to the missing Bigs. Solamae believed in herself and in her ability to figure out a solution to any problem. She wanted her Mother to be proud of her, and she wanted to help others, so she never stopped trying, or believing that she could.

Later that morning, when Mrs. Big awoke and found Solamae's note, she was so happy and excited that

she immediately woke up Ustabe. They began planning a Big celebration. All of the little Bigs woke up because of all of the commotion, and they joined in on the hustle-bustle. “Let’s decorate the house,” said Mrs. Big while handing out crepe paper and balloons. Ustabe chimed in, “We can paint a Big ‘Welcome Home’ sign and put it up for them.” There was a whirl of activity all day long. The little Bigs were so tired by the end of the day that they all fell asleep without their dinner. Mrs. Big and Ustabe prepared a wonderful homecoming meal before going to sleep that night and they wrote a Big thank you note to Solamae and Puppino and put it in the middle of the table for everyone to see.



Tomorrow



While the day had passed quickly on the ship, the two brave heroes, Solamae and Puppino, were once again trudging up the mountain. They were in a desperate search for the two lost souls. They had to return to the ship before it sailed tomorrow. This was unfamiliar territory to both of them, but they never lost hope or even doubted their own ability. They had both learned that if they just trusted, they would be successful. And they were! They found Mr. Big and Pee Wee in the exact spot Solamae had dreamed about. They were huddled around a bonfire keeping warm. “We knew you would come to rescue us!” Mr. Big called out to them. Pee Wee and Mr. Big ate all the Joe Froggers before anyone could blink.

Then, they headed back to the ship for the Big party and the warmest welcome home anyone could imagine.

It was dusk now, and the sun was setting in the west. The moon was rising in the east, and the ship was pulling away from the dock. Solamae felt sad. She had been so concerned about returning Pee Wee and Mr. Big to their family that she had not even taken time to ask about her own family in the last two days. Just then, Puppy came running up to the deck of the ship where Solamae stood watching the sunset. She ran right over and started licking Solamae's face and clowning around in her special way. Solamae thought about how much Puppy loved her. She thought of the Bigs, and about how they loved her, and the Beanies, and all the new friends she had made who loved her. *Tomorrow*, she thought, *I will ask tomorrow. It will be a good day...tomorrow.*



Peace



Tomorrow came and went in the blink of an eye. Solamae never got around to asking about her family. *Surely, Mr. Big would have told me by now if he had any good news.* Besides, she was tired and couldn't bear another disappointment. It had been almost one year, and not a word of news about her family. Solamae was losing hope. She wondered if she would ever see her mother and father again. Worse, she wondered what might have happened after she left the palace that night. She wondered and worried. Naturally, Puppy could tell that something was bothering Solamae. So she started clowning around, trying to cheer Solamae up! "Solamae, let's go up on the deck and practice our sea legs and

breathe some salt air. The waves are big today, it will be sooooo much fun!”

Solamae tagged along although she really wasn’t in the mood for any fun. This was just the first day of a long journey, and no one seemed to know where they would wind up when the ship finally docked this time. As soon as they got up on deck, a big wave came crashing over the ship! All the sailors were scrambling around, trying to get the ship back under control, but the waves kept crashing and pounding. Everyone was wet, and the wind was blowing so hard that both Solamae and Puppy’s whiskers were flat against their faces. “This is fun!” Solamae cried out, as she and Puppy were jumping the waves. Puppy was pretending that she couldn’t get her sea legs adjusted, and that made Solamae fall down laughing.

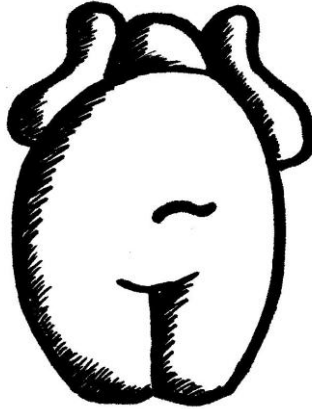
After things finally calmed down and they stopped laughing so hard, the two friends made their way to the very front of the ship. They crawled out onto the ship’s point, a place called the bowsprit. They dangled their feet in the breeze and enjoyed the salty mist on their faces.



Looking out over the vast sea, Solamae realized something important. *I may be little compared to this great sea, and I may be lost, but I have already accomplished great things for others, and that means I can do it for myself, too.*

As the sunset, a peaceful feeling settled over Solamae. They didn't talk much, but Puppy knew this was just the thing that Solamae needed to lift her spirits. Both of them were brave and determined little heroes.

Mysterious Cargo



It was just one week into their journey, and already there was talk of stopping at a foreign port to take on some more cargo. “Scuttlebutt” was what the sailors called it, “just rumors.” None of this made any sense to Solamae. She knew from her last voyage that it would take one whole month to travel to wherever it was they were going, so she decided to go to Mr. Big and ask him. He always seemed to know everything about everything, except when Solamae would ask him about her family. Then, Mr. Big would just clam up. Now she was mad at him. “Well...maybe he just doesn’t have any news,”



Puppy chimed in. “This could be true,” Solamae said, “besides, we need to know if we’re going ashore.”

Mr. Big had learned, by spying on the sailors, that the unscheduled stop was not their final destination. He told them that he heard the sailors saying the ship would only be at the port for a few hours, just long enough for them to load some mysterious cargo. After that, they would be off on their journey once again. The sailors never caught on to the fact that the Bigs were stowaways on their ship and they never knew that Mr. Big would listen in on their conversations, or that the little Bigs were watching them work.

Solamae, Puppino, and Ustabe, the nosiest Big, stayed up all night trying to figure out what in the world the mysterious cargo could be. But none of them could imagine what a wonderful surprise awaited them. Just before morning, Nosey had an idea. “Let’s go up on deck right now before daylight so we can find a good place to hide and watch what’s going on.”

They settled down under one of the lifeboats as the ship was docking. It was rapidly getting to be daylight

now, and they barely made it before all of the sailors began loading the mysterious cargo. Whatever it was, it sure had everyone excited! “I don’t believe my eyes,” Puppy exclaimed, “it’s an elephant!” Nosey had already figured it out, “It’s a circus! Yippee, yea! A circus!”

One by one, the circus animals were going below to the empty room where the burlap sacks had been stored. What the three friends couldn’t guess was how much fun their new neighbors would be. Just then, it dawned on Solamae. “That’s why the room was empty when we left last week, because the circus was coming!” She remembered when the circus had come to the palace. “There should be some circus mice, too. They do magic tricks and play jokes and dress up like clowns.”

The three friends were so happy. They couldn’t wait to go below and meet their new neighbors and begin having fun.



A Good Name



When the threesome made it to the room where all the animals were, they were greeted with rousing cheers. The elephant was the first to speak up. “I saw you hiding under the lifeboats, and I was hoping we could be friends.” “Yes, yes, of course,” all three friends chimed in at the same time. “We were hoping so, too.” Solamae asked if they had met the Big family yet. As it turned out, all the little Bigs and the big Bigs had come out as soon as they heard the strange sounds that elephants, camels, horses, donkeys, zebras, lions, tigers and bears all made. They all became friends, except... ”Where are the circus mice?” Solamae was sorely disappointed. She couldn’t hide her distress from any of them. “Don’t worry Solamae,” her new friend the elephant said, “they are

busy unpacking and ironing their costumes. They will be performing for all of you tomorrow!” Well, when everybody heard that, there was even greater excitement in the air.

“Oh boy!” exclaimed Solamae “thank them very much, and tell them to rest up for tomorrow. Thank you too, elephant. By the way, what is your name?” The elephant thought for a long, long time. “I don’t think I have a name,” her large new friend replied. Solamae remembered how carefully the Beanies had chosen just the right name for their little goddess. “Don’t you worry, before the show starts tomorrow we will find you a name; a name befitting your size and your friendly nature.”

It was late by the time everybody finally settled down. Even then, Mrs. Big had to keep reminding them, “Remember; we promised elephant a good name before tomorrow’s show.” But they were completely worn out from all the excitement, and they had already fallen asleep. Mrs. Big didn’t worry though, because she had grown to trust Solamae never to break a promise.



The Circus



The next morning, it was Puppino and her Italian heritage that produced a fitting name for the elephant, Cicilianna! She exclaimed during breakfast, while everyone else was still half-asleep. “What did you say?” None of the little Bigs could pronounce the name, so Solamae said, “I know, we’ll call her Sissy, because she’s like a big sister to all of us!” Everyone agreed with that. They made a little crown out of pretty beads and they went out to find the elephant to deliver her new name. They looked and looked for the elephant, but no one knew where she had gone. “Mr. Big will know, let’s go ask him. He knows everything.” Solamae was right, he

pointed to the kitchen. “The elephant is right there. She’s making candies for you to have at the circus.”

Sissy looked so cute in her little tiny apron, with her tiny little crown on her head. She was putting her candies in tiny, little, itty-bitty boxes and decorating each one, individually. Solamae and Puppino got theirs first. “Because you have taken so much care to crown me ‘Cicilianna,’ and because you have accepted me as a sister, and, most of all, because I’m not afraid of you, like most elephants are!”

Mr. and Mrs. Big spent the rest of the morning explaining why elephants were usually afraid of mice. Solamae had the most questions of all. It seemed that Sissy had been able to overcome her fearful instincts of mice because of the circus mice she had worked with every day for so long. Sissy had become their big sister too! Now it was time for the circus to begin, and time to meet the wonderful circus mice! Oh, and time to sample Sissy’s candies.

The circus mice had cleared out the middle of the room and had put up a circus tent. Everyone entered



through a small opening. When they all got inside, to their surprise, it felt just like a big circus. There were little mice swinging on the trapeze, walking the tightrope, doing tricks, and taming wild animals. In the center of the ring, little mice were riding on little puppy dogs' backs! Puppino was thrilled; everyone else was delighted, too. None of them had ever been to the circus before, except for Solamae, and she said it was even better than the biggest circus she had ever seen. The costumes were so beautiful, and Sissy's candies were so delicious.

At the end of the show, the circus mice all waited at the doorway. Everyone introduced themselves to the family, told a little bit about themselves, where they were from, and how they became circus mice. They wanted to make friends with the family. Solamae had many questions, and so did Puppy. She asked if they would teach her how to train mice to ride on her back. After many Big hugs and Big thanks, they all went home happy. After dinner, the Bigs were unusually quiet. For some reason, they didn't seem to be looking forward to

The Little Mouse Solamae

getting to know the circus mice as much as Solamae and Puppy were. Tomorrow was sure to be a memorable day for the Bigs.



New Friends



Solamae was up early the next morning, eager to get to know more about her new friends. Puppino was eager too, but the Bigs had a lot of excuses. They didn't seem very interested in making new friends. "What could this be all about?" Solamae wondered out loud.

Mrs. Big overheard Solamae and Puppy trying to convince the little Bigs to come with them. She sat everyone down to talk about it. After a little while, it became apparent to Solamae that all of the Bigs were having some trouble with the idea of making new friends. Solamae couldn't imagine why the family wouldn't want to make friends with the circus mice, and she demanded an explanation. To her surprise, Pee Wee was the first to speak up; he was usually the shy one. "They're so

different.” Solamae was puzzled; “What does that have to do with anything?” Ustabe then tried to explain. “They come from a different land and they speak a different language.” Solamae was growing weary; each of the Bigs seemed to have a different excuse for not wanting to make new friends. “We are all different too, aren’t we?”

Puppino had been sitting quietly by the door, secretly wishing Solamae would just go with her. The pup really liked making new friends and didn’t care if they were different or not! In fact, she was looking forward to learning how to have mice ride on her back just like the circus dogs did!

Finally, Solamae stood up and faced the door. “Puppy and I are going to play with the circus mice. We’re not afraid that they won’t like us. Besides, they have already shown us that they want to be our friends by sharing their wonderful talents with us and by being so nice to us yesterday. Maybe we can help them in some way. Maybe we can teach them things that they don’t know. You’re all just afraid that the circus mice won’t like you, but Puppy and I aren’t afraid. The circus mice



aren't afraid, even Sissy isn't afraid! You guys are going to miss all the fun. See you later!"

Puppy leapt out the door with Solamae right on her tail. All of the little circus mice were waiting to teach them a new game; one that they had played in their homeland. They became fast friends, and it wasn't very long before all the Bigs came out to play too! Mrs. Big was passing around a platter of Joe Froggers, and everyone was having a wonderful time! Once again, Solamae had succeeded in being a good example, and the Big family had learned an important lesson; how to make new friends.

Memories



That night at dinner the air was still filled with the excitement of the wonderful day. The little Bigs were all chattering about what they had learned from their new friends. They could hardly wait until tomorrow to play the new game that their friends brought them from Circus Land. Puppy was already happily asleep in her bed; she had given each of them rides on her back and done new tricks all day! Solamae was so glad that the Bigs had decided to join in the fun, and Mr. and Mrs. Big were grateful to Solamae for showing them how not to be afraid and how to make new friends. All this while, the circus mice were planning their next performance. It would be at a birthday party for Sissy. She would be one hundred years old tomorrow!



Sissy had lived all those long years with generations of circus mice and had never forgotten one of them, or forgotten where she had traveled with them. They had performed all over the world. She remembered the great, great, great, great, grandmothers, and grandfathers of all the clowns, the magicians, the tight wire and trapeze artists, and the animal trainers. It was Sissy who kept the circus mouse history alive! Through wars and famines, through times of want and times of plenty, Sissy was always there, recording circus history in her memory. She was responsible for keeping the Circus Land culture and the traditions of the circus mice, and she had passed them down from generation to generation. Sissy was grateful for the long life and good memory that God had given her, and she always did her best to use that gift in order to help preserve her friends' memories for them. She was a wonderful elephant, and even her candy recipes came from the good old days!

Sad News



The next morning after breakfast, Solamae, Puppino, and all the little Bigs were busy playing the new game from Circus Land when Mrs. Big appeared. She reminded them that it was time for Sissy's big birthday party. They all gathered in the little circus tent, waiting for the show to start. Puppy was fooling around with the clowns and giving them rides on her back. She liked pretending she was part of the circus, and the circus mice liked that, too. Suddenly, the music started and the ringmaster walked out into the center ring. "I have an announcement to make," his voice boomed. It sounded very serious, and it turned out to be very sad news.

Everyone was waiting to hear what the ringmaster would say. "Our beloved Sissy," he said with tears in his



eyes, “Our beloved Sissy...” the ringmaster began again, but he couldn’t get the words out of his mouth. “Oh no!” everyone exclaimed, “Oh no!” Last night, in her sleep, Sissy died of old age, the ringmaster continued. “She was smiling her prettiest smile when we found her,” the ringmaster sadly explained.

Everyone was stunned...There were lots of questions...and the ringmaster, who was the eldest of the Circus mice, answered them all, one by one.

Solamae was the first to speak up, “Why are you playing the music when this is such a sad day?” she asked. “Because Sissy would want us to be happy for her,” the ringmaster tried to explain. “Today is truly her birthday, and she is starting a new life in Heaven.”

Ustabe Big was the next to speak, “But why did she have to go?” The ringmaster answered, “It was her time. Sissy lived almost twice as long as most elephants usually live. She did great things with her life and she made us all so happy the whole time she was with us.”

Pee Wee spoke next, and through his tears, he asked the ringmaster, “But who will carry on the

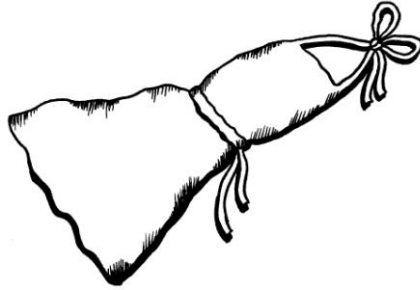
traditions of Circus Land?” “Sissy will!” the ringmaster replied. Then he explained, “By her telling us all her memories, and by us telling them to our children, Sissy carries on our traditions”

“What about her candies?” the pup wondered softly. Like most puppies, Puppino was thinking mainly of her stomach. This made everyone laugh. “Now, having a good laugh is what Sissy would want us to do,” said the ringmaster when the laughter died down. He was smiling now, and so was everyone else. “Sissy left her recipes in a tin box in the kitchen. Some of the Circus Mice have already started making “Sissy Candies” for today’s performance, and I think Sissy would want us all to celebrate her and not to cry for her.”

Mrs. Big asked next, “We will all miss Sissy soooo much. What can we do?” The ringmaster explained in a gentle voice, “Sissy is right here with all of us, in our hearts, and she will never go away as long as we keep her memory alive.” Everyone bowed their heads in a moment of silence.



Sissy's Blessing



That evening's performance had been dedicated to Sissy. It was the best performance the circus mice had ever given. Everyone had taken a short nap, and now the sun was beginning to set. It was time for the saddest part of the day; the funeral.

Sissy had instructed them about the Circus Land traditions many times. Everyone said goodbye to Sissy and promised never to forget her. She was buried at sea before the sun set on the same day that she died. Everyone agreed that Sissy looked very pretty in her beaded crown.

After that, they all went below decks for dinner, and it was a very quiet meal, indeed. Then, Solamae noticed Sissy's apron hanging in the kitchen. "Look

everybody,” she exclaimed, pointing to it. Sissy had embroidered her new name on it, in colorful letters.

CICILIANNA ♥ I LOVE YOU ALL

They were all so happy knowing that Sissy would never forget them either! One by one, they told the stories and traditions they had learned from Sissy. It was as if she were still right there with them. Each of them said how lucky they were that she had lived so long and cared so much about them all. They all agreed that Sissy was a blessing.



Next Stop



It was several weeks before everyone started feeling like themselves again. They talked about Sissy all the time. They were trying to get over the shock by loving her out loud. No one, not even Mr. Big, seemed to know when or where the ship would dock this time, so they just relaxed and waited for word to come.

Occasionally, Nosey would hide under the lifeboats and listen to the scuttlebutt. The sailors were constantly grumbling about the place they were going to dock, but not even Mr. Big could figure it out. The sailors would complain about traffic and tall buildings and about it being dirty there. None of this made any sense to any of them. Solamae and Puppino hadn't traveled much, but

the Bigs had, and the circus mice certainly had, but none of them could even imagine such a place! So, they just waited. Besides, Solamae had finding her family on her mind, and she needed to make a plan.

That same evening, she asked Puppy to go up on deck with her. They went to their special place, the bowsprit, way out on the point of the ship, so they could dangle their feet in the sea breeze. It helped them clear their heads. Solamae confided to Puppy, “I don’t have any idea what to do.” But, of course, Puppy had lots of ideas, and one of her ideas sounded like it might work. So, once again, Solamae and Puppino drew their plans. As soon as they went ashore, they would go to the Department of Information and ask about Solamae’s family. They would tell what had happened so long ago, and then they would explain why it was so very important; because Solamae’s family had never met Puppino. That part was the Puppy’s idea.

Just as the sun was setting, Solamae and Puppino spotted land! It was all crooked, just like small mountains, but they were too regular to be mountains.



“What in the world?” Solamae exclaimed, “Let’s go get Mr. Big right now, he’ll know where we are.” They both scurried down below to get the Bigs. Everyone hurried back up on deck, and when they were all finally settled, it was almost dark. They could see tiny lights, like fireflies, but these were all in rows and they were staying lit and keeping still. Mr. Big couldn’t see so well. He was getting old, and his eyesight was failing. Mrs. Big said she had never seen anything like those lights in all her days.

Finally, Solamae thought of something. “It looks like a bunch of palaces, all crowded together, but why would they be so close to one another?” Solamae was remembering home where there was lots of distance between the palaces. As a matter of fact, you couldn’t even see any of the other palaces from where she lived!

Just then, Nosey remembered the scuttlebutt the sailors had been grumbling about. Their words came back to her, “Too crowded, too dirty and too much traffic.” Puppy chimed in, “No wonder the sailors said

those things, there's not enough room to run around and play. What kind of a place is this?" she demanded.

As the family was deciding to get a good night's rest and to be ready to dock in the morning, and when they could see well enough to figure out where they were, they passed a huge statue of a green lady with a crown something like Sissy's. She was holding up a torch. A sign below her read:

*"Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed, to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"*

Solamae's spirits were lifted by those beautiful words. She slept well that night, knowing that she would surely be able to get some help in this place, wherever it was!



Swept Away



The next morning, Solamae and Puppino were up on deck before first light. The ship had docked during the night. It wasn't foggy, but they still couldn't make much out. It looked pretty much like every other dock, but far, far busier! All of a sudden, Puppy spotted a sign on the dock that read, "Welcome to the Big Apple." Then she called to Solamae, "Oh, the Bigs are going to love this!" Solamae quickly read the rest of the sign, "Port of New York City, New York. Hurry, Puppy, let's go tell the Bigs that we're in New York, New York. I hope they'll know what that means!"

On the way down below, they almost collided with

the Bigs. “We’re in New York, New York! We’re in New York, New York!” They all started shouting it together. Leave it to Nosey to ask the all-important question, “What IS a New York, New York anyway?” Mr. Big was becoming annoyed, “One New York is all I can take at the moment, PUL...LEEZE.” Then Puppy tried her usual antics to cheer up Mr. Big. “They have big apples here, BIG APPLES, you know, just for the Bigs.” Well...everyone laughed sooooo hard at that. Puppy didn’t really know what she had said, but she thought it was funny, anyway.

It looked like everyone was going ashore. Solamae couldn’t find Mrs. Big to get their provisions. Solamae was holding on to Puppy’s tail so they wouldn’t become separated. The next thing they knew they were swept away into a large crowd, but Solamae kept hold of Puppy, and away they went. It seemed so crowded everywhere. Cars and trucks were flying by. It was all they could do not to be run over or stepped on, so they couldn’t pay much attention to where they were going or even think

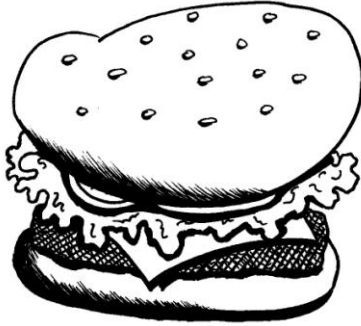


clearly! They just followed the crowd.

Finally, they saw a park. Puppy turned fast, and made a beeline for the trees, causing Solamae to fly into the air! “Whee, I’m flying just like Pee Wee. This is fun.” Thank goodness, she landed O.K., and then caught up with Puppy. “Whew, no wonder the sailors were saying those bad things about New York. It’s even crowded in the park!” Puppy agreed, and took notice of some other dogs that were playing in the park. “At least the other dogs look friendly,” she noticed.

They sat in the park, caught their breath, and tried to decide what to do next. “We don’t have any provisions, Puppy, I don’t know what to do.” Puppy always took care of everything; she was full of good ideas, and she had lots of courage. Solamae had grown to depend on her good friend. “I don’t know what I would do without you,” Solamae admitted. Puppy just smiled; she had beautiful teeth and such a happy face.

A Plan



Solamae rested for a long time under a shade tree in the park while Puppy played with the other dogs, and tried to get some information about the Department of Information. Puppy had so much energy; she never got tired, especially when she was needed. Solamae was beginning to worry about getting across the street without being run over or squashed, when Puppy came running up. “O.K.,” she said, “Now, this is what we’re going to do. I have the directions to the department.” Puppy never doubted that her plans would work or ever doubted that she could accomplish them. “This time I will ride you on my back, like the circus mice, so we can be sure not to get separated again.” Solamae agreed right away, putting



all her trust in Puppy. Besides, she was tired and a little frightened from the last ride. It was fun flying through the park, but she was not so sure she would land safely again.

Puppy made it to the Department of Information in lightning fast time. She didn't have to slow down to wait for Solamae now. When they got there, a sign read "CLOSED." "Oh no!" they both wailed at the same time. Puppy turned to a passerby, a large German Shepherd who was walking beside a man who was blind. Solamae tried to stop Puppy, because she was afraid of such a large dog. "Don't worry Solamae, he's nice. Do you see how kind he is with his master, he won't hurt me." Puppy was always right.

The German Shepherd explained that the department closes for lunch every day at noon. This made Solamae and Puppy very hungry, but they had no idea how they would find any food. The blind man overheard them discussing their problem. It turned out that he was nice, too. "I smell hamburgers and they're just down the block a little way." Puppy was amazed,

“Wow, you’re good!” “Well, ya’ see,” said the blind man, “or should I say, when ya’ don’t see, then you can hear, taste, and smell better.” The blind man had a strange way of putting things, and he spoke oddly, but everyone got the message and headed down the block for lunch.

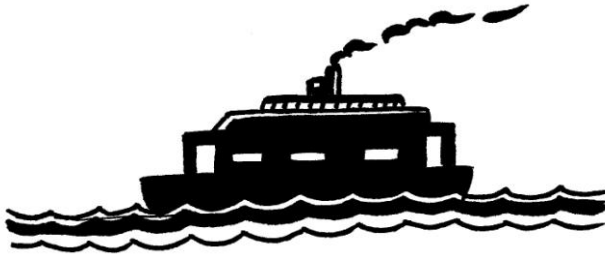
While they waited for the department to open, Solamae and Puppy got their introduction to New York. The blind man had lived in the city all of his life, and even though he couldn’t see, he knew his way around very well. “How come you need your dog then?” Puppy asked. Then she remembered how difficult it was for her and Solamae to get across the street. “Oh, and what’s his name? And what is YOUR name?” The man looked surprised; he had never met a more curious dog. “My name is Dan, and my dog’s name is Buddy. We have been best of friends for ten years. Buddy has worked hard all that time to protect me and keep me company. Buddy saved my life more than once, crossing the street, and I am most grateful for his company. Ya’ see, it can be lonely bein’ blind. Most people are in a hurry and don’t



want to take the time to be friends with me because I take so long to do everything.” Solamae then interrupted, and she told Dan that she and Puppy had all the time in the world for him. Then she added, “Just like you and Buddy have for us!”

Everyone was getting along so well. The time had passed without notice, and when they returned to the department, it was closed for the day. “It’s O.K., we can come back tomorrow.” Solamae wasn’t sorry, she knew how important it was to Dan to have some friends; and besides, he was soooo nice. Puppy and Buddy were having fun together too! It seemed like they all needed each other, and they were all willing friends.

The Big Surprise



Dan suggested that Solamae and Puppy spend the weekend at his home since all the offices would be closed until Monday. Besides, he wanted very much to show them around the city and have some fun. So, first thing the next morning, Dan said, “Ya’ know, it’s awfully hot out today. Would you like to take a boat ride?” Both Solamae and Puppy answered at the same time. “Oh yes! We’re sailors ourselves, but where do you keep your boat?” Dan just laughed, “Oh, I don’t have a boat.” Puppy turned her head to the side and looked at Solamae as though to say, “What is wrong with our friend, Dan?” Then Dan explained. Dan’s favorite thing to do on a hot day in New York was to take the Staten Island Ferry. “And it only costs a quarter,” he added.




There is one thing about making new friends; you'll always learn something new!

They packed a lunch and some drinks, and off went the four of them. When they got to the ferryboat, there was a long line waiting to board. Some people were waiting in line in their cars. When the ferryboat arrived, they drove their cars right onto the deck of the boat! Then Dan told them, "It's called a ferryboat because it carries people and their cars across the New York Harbor to Staten Island. We can ride back and forth all day if we want to!" Again, both Solamae and Puppy spoke at the same time, "We want to! We really want to! We really, really, REALLY want to!" By this time, Buddy had joined in too. "O.K., O.K.," Dan said. "Anyway, I have a big surprise for you, but you have to wait until it gets dark to find out what it is.

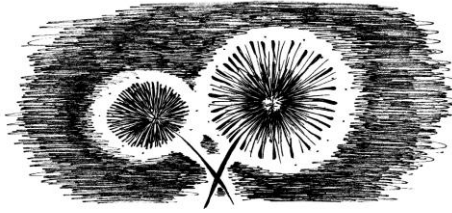
The ferryboat ride began with Dan telling them all about Ellis Island, which they would soon be passing. "Over sixteen million people came to New York from all corners of the earth between 1892 and

1954, and now the main building on the island is a beautiful museum.” Solamae’s eyes got wide, “Well no wonder it’s so crowded!” Dan had just begun his story about Liberty Island when Puppy spotted the big green lady with the crown again. “There she is-s-s-s-s, Miss A-me-ri-ca!” sang Puppino. Everyone laughed and laughed at that.

It was wonderful to be back out on the water. One day in the city had been more than enough for the two adventurers. They were ready for some sea air and an adventure of a new sort. Dan had settled in a deck chair with his feet up, and Buddy was taking a nap under his chair. But Solamae and Puppino were too excited to sleep. They decided to go back out to their favorite place on the ship’s bowsprit, where they could dangle their feet in the breeze and talk. Neither of them could even begin to imagine what surprise Dan had in store for them when it got dark. What fun!



A Picture in the Sky



That evening, just as it was getting dark, Buddy brought Dan out on the ferry's point where Solamae and Puppy had spent the day laughing and forgetting about their problems. Dan began explaining about Independence Day. "It's one of the most popular celebrations of patriotism in America." Solamae and Puppy only had one question, "Patriotism?" they both asked. "Yes, patriotism. It means that Americans love their country and treasure their freedom." Then Dan continued, "Every year on the holiday we call the Fourth of July they have fireworks displays to celebrate."

Before Solamae and Puppy could ask any more questions, the sky was filled with fireworks! It was so beautiful. Everyone on the ferry was watching in surprise and wonderment at the beautiful colors and patterns. "WOW! WOW! WOW!" echoed the crowd. Then

Solamae remembered that Dan couldn't see the colors and patterns of the beautiful fireworks, and so she began describing them to him. She painted a picture of the sky with words, just for Dan, so that he could 'see' the beautiful colors and patterns just the same as everyone else could see them.

Puppy was clowning around with Buddy. "You are lucky to live in such a great place as America," he said. Buddy proudly answered, "I am lucky to have Dan to take care of, too." Puppy looked surprised. She could tell that Buddy had a very hard job watching out for Dan in all the traffic and she knew that Buddy couldn't ride Dan on his back the way Solamae rode on hers. "I know," said the pup, "but isn't it hard to wait and be patient when it takes Dan so long to do everything?" Puppy was used to making quick decisions and getting things done in a hurry. "No," replied Buddy, "it's not hard because I love Dan, and when you love somebody, even the hardest things are easy to do." This made Puppy all the more determined to help Solamae with her dilemma. She wanted to be just like Buddy!

A Day in the Park



The next day was Sunday. Everything was closed, so the four new friends decided to spend the day playing in the park. Solamae and Puppy taught Dan and Buddy the game they had learned from the circus mice. Remembering that Dan could not see, Solamae made up some new rules so that he could play, too. They were all having a great time playing, but all the while Puppy kept thinking about Solamae and wondering how she could help with Solamae's dilemma. Her little plan for the Department of Information hadn't worked very well so far, and she was getting worried.

Puppy called Buddy aside to ask his advice. Buddy was a big dog, and he was used to the city. "If you find

the department closed again tomorrow, go back down to the docks. I know a guy who keeps the records of all the ships, passengers, and cargo. Maybe he can help you find Solamae's family." Puppy thought it was a good idea to talk to Buddy's friend at the docks, so they just took off right then, forgetting to tell Solamae or Dan where they were heading. The other dogs that had joined in the game didn't even notice that Puppy and Buddy had left, but it wasn't very long before Solamae noticed. She had grown used to Puppy being right by her side. "Dan, I think maybe, Puppy and Buddy...I don't know, they are just GONE!"

It was getting dark and Solamae was afraid she wouldn't be able to lead Dan home if they waited any longer. They walked together quietly, not daring to think what might have happened to their two best friends.

Back at Dan's house, the shock of what happened was setting in. Solamae was beginning to wonder if she would ever see Puppino again, and Dan was beginning to wonder about Buddy, too. How could he ever make it without Buddy? Neither of them ate any dinner or talked




about their fears. It was as though talking about it would make their worst fears real. Sadly, they finally decided to try to get some sleep. Solamae dreamed that everything was O.K. She had learned to trust her instincts, and in the morning she went to find Dan so she could tell him about her good dream. Instead, she found a poem that Dan had written. It was lying on the table next to the chair where Dan had fallen asleep. It was titled “Lost Animals,” and it was very sad:

*Animals are a gift to the world
They belong to every Boy and Girl
But animals can have feelings too,
They are just like me and you,
I had a dog named Buddy,
So I should know
It's very sad to see them go*

Solamae couldn't stand to see Dan so sad, even in his sleep, so she woke him up to tell him about her dream. But nothing could cheer Dan up. Solamae tried to

convince him, “Don’t give up!” She urged Dan to try to believe that Buddy would come back. And just then, they both heard barking at the front door! Both of them ran to the door at the same time, and when they opened it, Puppino and Buddy were standing there with big smiles on their faces. They were just so pleased with themselves and with the news they were bringing about Solamae’s family.



Together Again



Solamae had been certain that Puppino was O.K. She had confidence, but Dan had never spent a minute without Buddy before last night. He didn't know that anyone else would ever be there for him, to lead him and guide him around. Dan was grateful to Solamae for showing him that the world was not such a cold and lonely place. He felt happy again and sat right down to write another poem. He wanted to erase all the sadness of yesterday. Dan titled his poem, "Happy Holiday"

The Little Mouse Solamae

*It's a beautiful summer day
And my favorite holiday
And all the leaves are green
And the wind is blowing pollen
And now the leaves will say
Happy Holiday!
And then the trees will say
Happy Holiday!
And now I'm here to say
Go outside to play
And remember to say
Happy Holiday!*

Solamae, Puppino, Dan, and Buddy all sat on the balcony overlooking the city that had almost swallowed up the two of them yesterday. They were all so happy to be together again and thankful for the beautiful summer day, eager to hear the news that Puppy and Buddy had gathered at the docks.

The Mystery



Dan had prepared a wonderful breakfast for the four of them, a breakfast that they had devoured as the city was coming to life. Solamae was still waiting for an explanation of their sudden disappearance yesterday when Buddy announced, “We’d better be heading for the Department of Information before it gets too late again.” “But Wait!” Solamae bellowed, half begging for any news they may have learned about her family. “Come along, Solamae, we’ll tell you everything we found out while we are walking, O.K.?” Buddy was trying to be patient and gentle; he understood how worried Solamae must be.

On their way, Solamae soon learned the little bits and pieces of news that Puppy and Buddy had lovingly

gathered for her. With the help of Buddy's friend, they had pored over the records of incoming ships and their cargos. One name on the passenger list stood out to both of them, "Irish," it read. Solamae had mentioned having an Aunt Irish who lived in New York and who often came to visit Solamae when she was a baby. It had never occurred to Solamae to try to find Aunt Irish because she didn't have a real name, just a nickname, and no last name that Solamae knew of.

Solamae's memories crowded her as she walked through the park. There was so much mystery about her past that she couldn't sort out what was a real memory from what she just wished was true. Ever since she ran from the palace that awful night, her world just seemed too difficult to understand. Solamae just couldn't put the pieces together. What had happened to cause such an upset in the comfortable life she had always known? Would she ever find her way back home and to her family? And, most importantly, would they be there when she did?



Cat & Bird



The four friends slowed down when they noticed a beautiful black bird lying in the grass. As they approached the beautiful bird Buddy cautioned them, “I think he might have fallen from his nest and broken something. He’s not moving!” At the same moment, a scruffy, one-eyed black cat came walking up to the group. He stopped to look at the bird. “What happened to you?” exclaimed Solamae, “you look awful! What happened to you? How did you lose your eye?”

The scruffy cat looked at Solamae as though he didn’t understand the question. He thought for a long time about the accident that had happened so long ago. Then, he simply said, “I fell down.” And that was that!

“OK?” Solamae had put a question mark on her ‘OK,’ inviting the scruffy cat to give them more details, but he looked off far into the distance and kept his silence. Puppino’s ears had stood up and rotated toward the scruffy cat’s voice. She knew all about accidents and how hard it was to talk about bad things after they had happened. “Well...I’m sure it wasn’t your fault,” Puppy tried to console the cat. After all, he had to live the rest of his life on Earth with only one eye, and that couldn’t be easy.

Puppy thought to change the subject, so she asked, “What is your name, is it Scruffy?” The scruffy cat answered without hesitation, “That suits me just fine.” Puppy tilted her head from side to side trying to understand. “But, WHAT is your name?” She asked again. “I never had a name until you called me ‘Scruffy,’ so that will be my name because it suits me.”

Now all the attention of the foursome was on Scruffy, but it was Dan who couldn’t see just how scruffy, Scruffy was. It was Dan who spoke first, “You sound to me like a very smart cat. I’ll bet that all of the



things that have happened to you have made you so smart and so strong inside, so being a little rough around the edges is really something to be very proud of. Look at this beautiful black bird, he looks so healthy and he is so young, but he is DEAD! And you are ALIVE!” Leave it to Dan to point out someone else’s good fortune. Pointing that out made Scruffy stand a little taller and hold his head a little higher.

After the sad funeral for the beautiful black bird, Buddy reminded everyone that it was time to go. They said their goodbyes to Scruffy, who walked away, taller and stronger, and all the better for having known the four of them.

When they arrived at the Department of Information, Buddy’s friend was just leaving. He gave them some very important news as he passed them in the hallway; news that could lead them to Solamae’s beloved Aunt Irish.

East to West



Buddy's friend had whispered the words, "In a brownstone, facing Central Park," as though they were confidential, top secret information. "Was my Aunt Irish a spy or something? What's a brownstone? Do we have an address?" asked Solamae. She was so excited that she almost choked on her words. Puppy was happy and smiling her prettiest smile. She remembered how friendly the other dogs were in the park, and she couldn't wait to meet up with her new friends again. "I hope Hector will be there," she said softly. She liked flirting with him! Hector was a cute terrier, just like puppy, and he thought Puppino was the most beautiful Italian Terrier he had ever seen.



Dan knew that it was going to be difficult to find Aunt Irish, what with no address and all. He might be blind, but he had walked the length of Central Park with Buddy many times. “O.K., this is what we need to do: Buddy and I will start at 110th Street, and Solamae and Puppy will start at 59th Street, at Columbus Circle in the Park. After that, we’ll meet in the middle.” Everyone gave a big shout, “Yip-Pee.”

Dan and Buddy were working their way toward Columbus Circle, where Solamae and Puppy were still talking with Hector and the group. One of the big German Shepherds had suggested knocking on all the doors and asking for Solamae’s Aunt Irish, but Solamae was feeling too shy for that. “Well...what else can you think of doing?” Puppy asked. She was happy to have all of Hector’s attention and didn’t want to push Solamae for a decision, but she knew how important finding Aunt Irish was. “I guess we should start knocking on doors then, come on Puppy, let’s go.”

Solamae had gotten her courage back just in time to come face to face with a big, red, Irish Terrier. “Oh,

excuse me,” he said after almost bumping into Solamae. “That’s O.K.,” Solamae was startled. Of course, Hector was keeping a watchful eye on the situation, in his strong, silent way. He was determined to protect all of Puppino’s friends, and that just made Puppy like him all the more. “I didn’t see you, where did you come from?” Solamae inquired of the red terrier. She wondered if Dan or Buddy might know the big red dog since they seemed to know everybody in New York; so she asked him his name. “My name is Irish, and I live in a brownstone facing the park. I’m in a hurry though.”

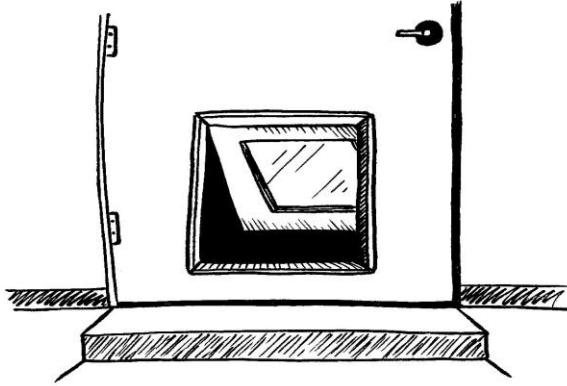
Solamae almost jumped out of her skin. “Oh, please, can you take a moment to tell me what a brownstone is?” The big, red terrier answered Solamae calmly. “Of course I can take a moment.” He could see that Solamae was shaken by the close call they had, but his senses told him that there was much more to it. He thought that Solamae must have had an important reason for asking, so he sat down and got ready to explain the whole story to her and her friends.



All of a sudden, Dan and Buddy appeared. They were both out of breath and very disappointed. They had not been able to find Aunt Irish, even after walking the whole length of Central Park. It was Puppy who tried to console them. She introduced Dan and Buddy to Irish and told them that Irish had a story to tell.

“Wow!” It dawned on Puppy, “your name is the same as Solamae’s Aunt Irish. She’s the person we’re looking for.” Irish just tilted his head, the same way that Puppy did when SHE was puzzled.

A Brownstone



Irish had gathered everyone around Solamae; Puppy, Dan, Buddy, and all their new friends, and then he began his story. Hector was paying close attention. He didn't want to get too far from Puppy, and he had decided to go along with the group just in case they needed his help. After all, he was a very smart terrier just like Puppy, and the way Hector saw it, the two of them together would make a magnificent team!

"So are you going to tell us what a brownstone is, or not?" Solamae was becoming impatient. Irish cleared his throat and began his story. "A brownstone is a house, well sort of a house. Maybe it's like several houses that



are built next to each other, touching each other, as a matter of fact. They are tall and narrow with three or four floors each, and they don't have any back yards to play in, or front yards for that matter-just stairs. Oh, and it has a doggy door for me so I can come here to the park in the daytime to get some fresh air and look for my master."

Hector had a feeling. "Please tell us about your master." Irish looked very proud. "Yes, of course. She's my namesake." Puppy was blinking her eyes and tilting her head from side to side, "What-in-the-Sam-Hill is a namesake?" "Well...it means she gave me her name." Everyone started mumbling, "How can you give your name away? Did she get a new name?" Irish could see that no one understood what a namesake was so she tried another way to explain, "I was named after my master. It is a great honor, because she is a great lady." Hector finally got it, "So your master's name is Irish too?" "Yes, well not exactly, everyone calls her Aunt Irish."

Solamae exploded, shouting, "Could it be possible? Where is she now? Can you take me to her? You said you were looking for her. Where did she go?"

Let's go to the brownstone. We can go in through the doggy door. COME ON! LET'S GOOOOOO!"

Before Irish could stop them, the whole group was heading down Fifth Avenue. The excitement was almost too much to bear, and no one was listening to Irish anymore. When they arrived at the doggy door, Irish warned them to put socks on their feet as soon as they got inside. "Aunt Irish is very fussy about keeping the house clean and she doesn't want us to track dirt or mud on her waxed floors."

Once inside the brownstone, they realized that Aunt Irish wasn't home. The house was dark and quiet except for their giggling. They were all sliding across the waxed floors in their socks and having a grand time doing it. "Wheeeee, this is fun. It reminds me of the first time I got my sea legs," exclaimed Solamae. Then she crashed right into Puppy!

They were laughing so hard that they couldn't get up, but Hector was there in a flash to help them. He gave special attention to Puppy, and even called her "Puppy Love," while helping her up. Everyone noticed when



Hector got down on his knees to pull Puppino's socks up; they all thought he intended propose to her, right then and there! This caused quite a stir among the group.

Disappointment



Aunt Irish's house had been full of laughter all day. The group had skated through all the rooms on all three floors, wearing their socks and looking everywhere for a clue as to where Solamae's Aunt Irish could have disappeared to. At the end of the day, Irish said, "Well, I tried to tell you that she went on a trip, but no one was listening to me!" Solamae apologized for the whole group. "We are so sorry, Irish. It's just that we were so excited and happy to have finally found her. Oh, and by the way, also to have bumped into you at the park. That was the best thing that has happened to us. Thank you Irish. Now, what do you think we should do?"

Irish didn't know what to say. She didn't know where her master had gone. "I have been looking for her



too; every day. She told me she was going on a trip, but that was so long ago. I guess she went very far away, and probably won't be back for a long, long time."

Everyone was quiet; the air was thick with disappointment. Their heads were down, their ears were down, their shoulders were slumped, and they were all crying. Hector couldn't stand to see Puppy so sad. Puppy couldn't stand to see Solamae looking so gloomy. Solamae couldn't stand to see everyone crying for her and she finally got the courage to speak up. "What is this? We can't just give up! Can we?" She didn't know what else to say. After all, it seemed as if they had done everything they could possibly do to find Aunt Irish, and they did find her; well, her brownstone house anyway! But she wasn't there.

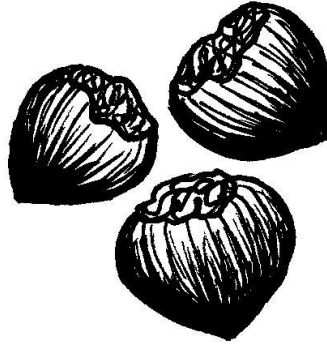
Solamae saw through the disappointment and reminded her friends of what they had accomplished. "Because of your hard work, now we know how to find Aunt Irish in the future. We will come back when she returns. Thanks, guys!"

The Little Mouse Solamae

They had put forth a lot of effort for just a little bit of progress. But since Solamae was willing to point out the good side of things, everyone felt better immediately, and they went their separate ways, feeling good about trying to help a friend.



Love



Everyone left-everyone but Hector, that is. He had no intention of getting too far away from Puppy. Hector was smitten with Puppino. He wanted to spend every minute he could with her and her friends. Once the long summer was over, Solamae began worrying about having to leave so soon. She thought Hector might be sad if he couldn't see Puppy every day. She had spoken to Hector about it before, but he continued to follow them everywhere they went, and he paid a great deal of attention to all of Puppy's needs, making her as comfortable as possible, and reassuring her in every way.

Hector took care of everything. It turned out Hector knew a lot about New York, too. He had a friend

in the Theatre District who got tickets for the five of them. They were going to see a famous play about a little boy who didn't want to grow up. They were walking together, nearing 46th Street and the Theatre District, when it started to snow! It was an early snowfall, and it came as a surprise to everyone, especially Puppy. She had never seen snow before and she was playing in it all the way to the theatre.

Hector was really enjoying watching Puppy play in the snow. Puppy was the happiest terrier there ever could be. Puppy always found the best in every situation, and she never lost hope or stopped believing that things would work out the best for everyone concerned. Her happiness was contagious! So, it wasn't long before they were all playing in the snow and getting into a friendly snowball fight.

Dan had an incredible aim, even though he couldn't see. He had a sixth sense about where they all were and could hit his target every time. Solamae was hit on the forehead with a big snowball. It smashed all over her face and then fell to the ground, covering her feet.



Her eyelashes and whiskers were heavy with wet snow. She looked like an Eskimo! She spit the snow out of her mouth and asked, "How did you do that Dan? Buddy told you where I was hiding, didn't he?" Dan just laughed. He wasn't giving away his secret just yet. "I'll tell you after the snow melts, but we need to go now, the play will be starting soon."

They made it to the theatre just in time; the curtain was going up, the orchestra was playing, excitement was building, and they could hardly wait to see the little boy called "Peter Pan." It was at that moment that he flew across the stage! The show was a wonder to behold.

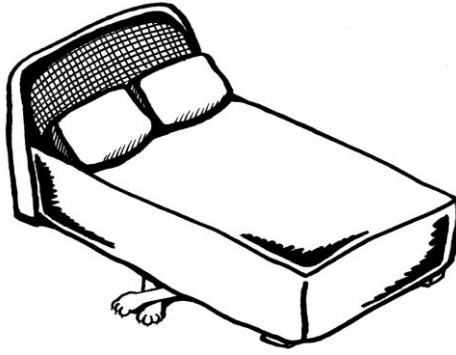
When the play ended, the group walked quietly towards Dan's house. They saw a man selling roasted chestnuts on the corner next to the park. Dan piped up, "Let's stop and get some, they're delicious. We can sit in the park for a while, and peel them and eat them. They are nice and warm and crispy, and they'll warm us up." He couldn't help but notice how quiet everyone was. He thought they might need to talk about what was on their minds.

By now, it had stopped snowing. The park was beautiful in the moonlight; there were no footprints in the newly fallen snow, and it looked like a scene from a painting. Stillness filled the air, and peace filled their hearts, making it easy to talk about their feelings. They settled down in a circle, and before long, the ground was covered with chestnut shells.

Hector had declared his love to Puppino by comparing himself to Peter Pan. “I wish I didn’t have to grow up. I wish none of us had to grow up, and then we could be together forever and ever, and stay just as we are.” When Puppy and Hector looked at each other, little stars seemed to fall from their eyes.



Growing Up



“We have been such good friends, all of us. I don’t know what to say.” Solamae was practicing her good-byes, and she was having a lot of trouble. Puppy had been snoozing under the bed when she overheard Solamae’s troubled speech. She stretched and yawned, trying to wake up enough to help Solamae. “Who’s under there?” Solamae asked, peeking under the bed just as Puppy was crawling out. They came face to face, and Puppy started licking Solamae’s face. They both began laughing and clowning around.

“Oh, Puppy, I almost forgot what a good friend you are. I was only thinking about how hard it would be when we have to leave Dan, Buddy, and all our new

friends in New York. I feel so bad about Hector; he loves you so much. I'm afraid he is going to be so sad when we leave." Puppy lay down on her stomach and crossed her front paws. She knew this could take a while. She stayed really quiet, hoping that Solamae would talk some more about her worries, but Solamae was quiet, too.

A long time passed, and then there was a knock on the door. It was Hector, coming to say goodbye. "What are you two talking about?" Hector seemed to be in a good mood, so Solamae decided not to spoil it by reminding him of just how sad she was sure he was going to be when they left.

Then, Hector gave them a present of beautiful words. "Do you remember when we were in the park last night, after the play? It had just stopped snowing and there were no footprints? I was wishing that time would stop and there would never be any footprints in the snow. I was wishing so hard that we could be like Peter Pan, and nothing would change, and we would never have to say goodbye. But things are going to change, and we do have to say goodbye, and we do have to grow up. But,



ya' know what? I'm glad, because I know that you will help Solamae find her way home and then you will come back and make lots of footprints in the snow! And that couldn't happen if we didn't grow up, could it?"

Solamae jumped up and gave Hector a hug. "So you won't be sad when we go?" she asked "Yes, of course. I will miss you both very, very, very much, but you will be so happy to find your family and that will make me happy to know. And you will both come back to see your Aunt Irish, and then we can all be together again. Yippee! Yay!" "Oh Hector," Puppy chimed in, "you are already all grown up!"

Footprints



Now it was time to say goodbye. Dan and Buddy came in, and the circle of friends held hands and wished each other good luck. There were tears and laughter as the five of them remembered all the adventures they had together.

Dan told about the first time he met Solamae and Puppy. “Buddy and I were walking down the street in front of the Department of Information when Puppy asked for help, and we all became fast friends.” He told about the ferryboat ride on Fourth of July, and how



Solamae had described the fireworks to him. “That was the first time I could ‘see’ fireworks, it was amazing!”

Then, Buddy remembered how he and Puppy left the park without telling Solamae and Dan where they were going, and scared them half to death. “But, we did get Aunt Irish’s address. Remember her red dog? And Scruffy, the cat?” Solamae then said, “We had so much fun skating in our socks the day we found Aunt Irish’s house, and even though she wasn’t home, we accomplished a lot! Thank you all.”

Puppy told some stories to Hector, Dan, and Buddy about when she first met Solamae. She told them how lonesome Solamae had been before she met Beanie in the woods, and how Beanie had hidden her in his jacket to surprise Solamae when she had to leave. “Solamae taught me how to be a sailor, how to get my sea legs, and how to trust! Oh, and, most importantly, she taught me how to help people. We rescued Pee Wee and Mr. Big from a mountaintop, and we were in a circus, too!”

Solamae told everyone about Sissy, the Circus elephant, and what a blessing she was. “As a matter of fact, Sissy saved a whole village from drowning once when she led them to high ground just before a tidal wave washed their village away. And Sissy kept the Circus Land traditions alive with her wonderful memory.” Just then, Puppy remembered, “And... she made the best candy!”

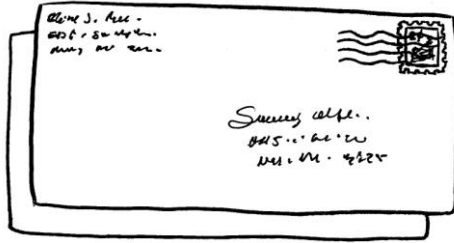
The five friends had talked the day away, reminding one another of all the wonderful things that had happened since Solamae began her adventure so long ago. “As a matter of fact,” Solamae said, “I am grateful for all the wonderful memories I have, and for all of you, and for all of the others. None of this could ever have happened if I had stayed in the palace, safe with my family. We have left our footprints all around the world!”

Solamae was trying to help everyone understand why she and Puppy had to go. “Puppy will help me find my way home, I know she will. But first, we have to find the Bigs. They are my only connection to my family, and they are probably worried about us. I must go back to the



ship and let them know that Puppy and I are all right, and get some news. One thing about Mr. Big, he knows everything about everything! I bet he even knows where Aunt Irish is, and for sure he will know what we need to do to find her and my parents. We will be back, soon enough,” Solamae promised with her mysterious smile. “I can’t wait to see what wonderful adventures lay ahead of us along the way!”

Wonderful News



The ship was waiting at the docks when Solamae and Puppino arrived there. It was a rainy day and everyone was below playing. Mr. Big had just come back from looking through the mail bags that were taken on board at the last port. He was waving a letter in the air and calling to Solamae in an excited voice. "Come here, hurry, hurry. This is the wonderful news we have been waiting for!" Everyone gathered around Mr. Big to hear what the wonderful news was. "Solamae's parents are waiting for us at the next port. We are all going back to the palace together for a big family celebration."

Solamae was excited by the prospect of seeing her parents again, but she would soon learn that things don't always turn out the way one expects them to.

The Author

Linda Cardinal Schneider

Born in Miami, Florida and raised in Asbury Park, New Jersey, Ms. Schneider has lived in Miami since the early 1960s. Ms. Schneider moved to North Carolina in 1980, where she married and subsequently took up the study of horticulture. Ms. Schneider operated a large Christmas tree farm and ornamental plant nursery specializing in choice and rare flowering trees. Until 2000, Ms. Schneider also operated a retail mail order nursery on the farm. Following that, Ms. Schneider returned to Miami.

Ms. Schneider retired in June 2007. She is presently pursuing a bachelor's degree in liberal studies at Barry University. Among Ms. Schneider's accomplishments during her first year at Barry University: her essay "The Path to Silence: The Uses of Meditation," tied for first place in the Sigma Tau Delta International English Honor Society Writing Contest. A term paper Ms. Schneider wrote for a humanities course on the subject of mythology is presently being published in an academic journal. Additionally, Ms. Schneider has been named Website Editor for the *Buccaneer*, Barry University's Newspaper.

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Good friends are among life's greatest gifts. I have been richly blessed to have these three gentlemen in my life. Thanks to them Solamae and her friends will continue their adventures for many years to come. I am eternally grateful.



Linda Cardinal Schneider
Author

The Little Mouse *Solamae*

The Little Mouse Solamae is an optimistic story, written to celebrate the joys of childhood and to help children and families deal with the challenges of growing up. The protagonist is a displaced little mouse who, after an unexplained separation from her family, travels the world looking for them.

This first volume in the forthcoming series takes the plucky little mouse on a sailboat journey from the magnificent palace where she had spent her sheltered life, to a vineyard in Italy and then on a whirlwind tour of New York City. Solamae faces many challenges and overcomes adversities with a winning sky's-the-limit spirit, all the while embracing the belief that she is capable of helping others out of their dilemmas as well. Her strong faith in herself is coupled with her faith in a higher power.

As the reader follows Solamae's larger-than-life dreams and discovers how she sweeps others up into believing in themselves as well, children are given the opportunity to pursue spiritual and personal growth. The story allows children to experience decision making and its consequences while educating them to contribute to the advancement of knowledge and values; it encourages the refinement of the human spirit in society.

The book is guaranteed to be a source of inspiration, entertainment, discovery and learning for children and young adults. The protagonist's wonderful, 'round-the-world adventures, her enduring spirit, and her strength of will to always do the right thing, combines innovation and social relevance, promoting childhood literacy and life-long reading without sacrificing youthful curiosity. This rich, colorful series will teach and inspire children of all ages, for many years to come.

Solamae's memories crowded her as she walked through the park. There was so much mystery about her past that she couldn't sort out what was a real memory from what she just wished was true. Buddy's friend at the docks had pored over all the records of incoming ships and their cargos; one name on the passenger list stood out. Now Solamae and her friends were heading back to the Department of Information to try to locate the mystery passenger. Buddy's friend had whispered the words, "In a brownstone, facing Central Park," as though it was confidential, top secret information.

