The Little Mouse Output Outp



Linda Cardinal Schneider



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VOLUME III 2018

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When you sit by the sea and it says, "What's on your mind today?"
That is where stories are born.

The Author

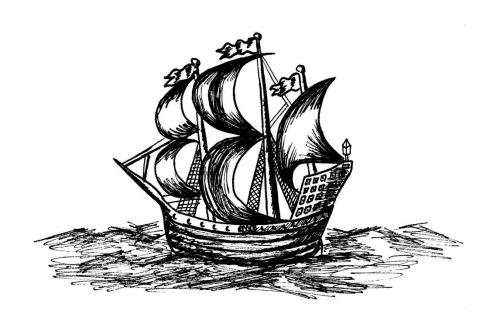
Dedication

TO ALL THE CHILDREN OF THE WORLD AND FOR THE CHILD WITHIN EACH OF US

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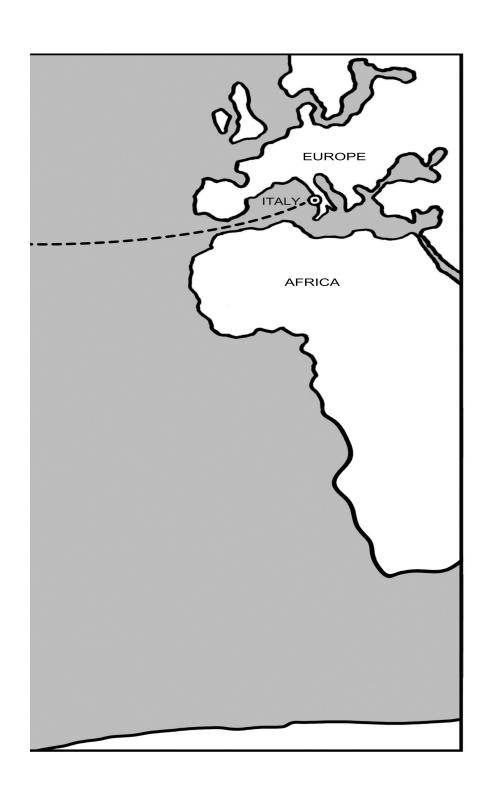
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Volume III



The South Pole & Caribbean Sea





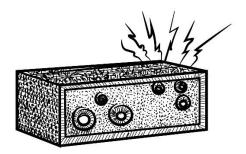
Introduction

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. 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.



Unknown Destination



Solamae and Puppino were enjoying riding the waves on the bowsprit of the ship, as was their daily habit. It had become their only source of entertainment during the monotonous days of this journey. Trying to uncover the motives of Professor Frumpstern and Professor Zieghead had become an obsession for the two friends; it was all they talked about during these long-drawn-out days. Driven by boredom, they decided to begin their own expedition today. They were planning a covert spying mission; they were determined to uncover Frumpy and Ziggy's top-secret plans.

It had been one whole month since those two mysterious professors had commandeered their ship, and still no one could figure out what they were up to. There

was something very odd about the two professors, it was unspoken, but everyone on the ship had noticed it. One thing was certain; they were heading south, *way* south, toward the southern tip of Argentina. This was the very place that Captain Julian had tried to avoid before, by crossing the Panama Canal. Why was he so easily convinced to travel there now?

"Where did those two come from anyway?" Solamae wondered aloud. "They just appeared in Nicaragua, posing as scientists and requesting a ride to Costa Rica without any explanation at all." Puppy had an idea, "Let's go peek into the porthole of their cabin. Maybe we can discover something." The two snoops scurried off to begin their undercover work. They were more determined than ever to expose the professors' hidden motives.

Once they were in place at the porthole, and within earshot of any conversation going on inside, they could hear a message blaring over a shortwave radio on the professors' desk. The person on the radio was speaking in a foreign language, but Solamae and Puppy could tell that



it was important. The man kept repeating himself, over and over again. He was becoming more and more agitated with each of his attempts to raise the professors. Puppy had another brilliant idea, "They're not in their cabin right now, Solamae, why don't you sneak inside and have a look around?" Solamae entered through the porthole while Puppy kept watch outside. Puppino was at the ready to alert Solamae before she was discovered; lest their little plan was to unravel.

One whole hour passed during which the same message continued to blare over the radio. So far, no professors had returned to answer it and meanwhile, Solamae had not discovered anything amiss in the professor's cabin. It was almost dinnertime; they would be forced to call off their intelligence work for now and attempt to locate the two missing professors later. They now had a new puzzle to solve; where had Frumpy and Ziggy disappeared to? Solamae and Puppy had the same idea at the very same time, "Let's go find Squall," Solamae exclaimed. Puppy quickly added, "Maybe he knows where they are." The two friends had become so

close that they could almost read each other's minds. They were constantly finishing each other's sentences these days.

Squall was discovered on the bowsprit; he was taking a break from his daily work on the ship. It was not like Squall to concern himself in the business of others, but he too had some serious doubts about the two professors' intentions. Although he didn't have any idea where Frumpy and Ziggy had disappeared to, he had his own suspicions about the two so-called scientists so, he signed on to Solamae and Puppy's covert plan without hesitation.

Solamae had a new idea; "Let's see if we can get Pee Wee and Teeny to help us do some spying on the professors. They're both small enough to hide in plain sight; they won't ever get caught." Squall had his doubts about soliciting Pee Wee and Teeny, "Dems may gonna tell Mr. and Mrs. Big 'bout us." He knew that Mr. and Mrs. Big would not approve of their snooping, but Solamae insisted. She was certain that Pee Wee and Teeny must be just as bored as she and Puppy were. Surely, they would



welcome the chance to be part of the covert mission the threesome was planning. Solamae and Puppy headed below decks to recruit their new workforce. Squall had to get back to his duties, but he promised to check in with them at dinner. It was all hush-hush now, but their little secret was clearly written all over their faces.

Recruits



When Solamae and Puppino found Pee Wee and Teeny, they were in the middle of a heated argument about who had the biggest muscles. Ever since Tony had introduced them to conch pezzas back in Squall's hometown, both of the little guys had become huge fans of the delicacy. Pee Wee and Teeny were now the official conch cleaners for the Big family. They were constantly squabbling over who could slurp up the most pezzas and they didn't seem to mind that their muscle builders were part of the internal organs of the conch!

Today, the competition had flared into a full-blown argument about who was the stronger. Solamae feared that they would come to blows, so she quickly intervened. "Puppy and I have a secret," Solamae announced, loud enough to get their attention. "Tell us, tell us," Pee Wee and Teeny begged, "We promise we won't tell." Their



attention immediately shifted to Solamae and Puppy's clandestine plan and they both promptly signed on to the mission. Both of the little braggarts were relieved to let go of the bickering that the boredom of this long trip had led them to, in exchange for the promise of some excitement. There was no assigned leader, so each member of the team went their own way with the same goal in mind; locate the whereabouts of the professors and find out what they were *really* up to. They could compare notes that night, after dinner, in private.

In the meantime, Mrs. Big's boredom had led her to the kitchen; she had prepared a fine dinner for the family to enjoy. She had been hoping that her efforts would inspire some compliments, but it seemed as though no one was taking any notice of her good cooking. Instead, there was a lot of coded conversation being exchanged between Solamae, Puppy, Pee Wee, and Teeny. Mrs. Big spoke up, "Is there something going on that Mr. Big and I should know about?" Solamae knew that she would have to come up with an explanation that Mr. and Mrs. Big would approve of and she would have to do it without telling a

lie. "Oh, no; it's just a game we are playing. It's called 'Find the Professors.' They haven't been around much lately. Do either of you know where they are?" Mr. Big's eyebrows furrowed. He knew something, but he had no intention of revealing it.



Midnight Mission



Dinner was eaten in total silence. No one was willing to give up any information that might put their mission at risk of being uncovered. After dinner, the new team scattered; each of them attempted to get the goods on Frumpy and Ziggy, but their efforts did not uncover much information. Pee Wee and Teeny cooked up their own plan. They intended to sneak out of bed late that very night. They would enter the professor's cabin and hide there until morning. Surely, the professors would return at some point and the two spies might get lucky and overhear them discussing their plans.

Instead, it was Squall who showed up at the professor's cabin in the middle of the night. Captain Julian had sent him to retrieve the shortwave radio and bring it up to the deck of the ship. He was muttering to himself,

"Some ting strange goin' on dis night, dems lookin' at da stars; me don' no what dems up to!" Pee Wee and Teeny came out of hiding and Squall told them to go and wakeup Solamae and Puppy and bring them up on deck immediately. Pee Wee and Teeny crept into the mouse's house where everyone was sleeping peacefully. "Wake up!" they were trying to keep it down to a whisper. Solamae and Puppy yawned, "What's going on?" Solamae asked, still half asleep. "Squall said to tell you that something strange was happening." Pee Wee almost choked in excitement. Teeny added a little too loudly, "He said we should go up on deck right now and find out what it is." They tiptoed out, unnoticed and they headed straight for the ship's deck. They all agreed, "Now we can catch them red-handed."

Squall had been relieved of duty as soon as he handed over the radio to the captain. He had no choice but to entrust the remainder of the night's mission to the smallest members of the team. The foursome huddled up under a lifeboat watching what was going on in the moonlight. The two professors were there with Captain



Julian. Captain Julian was studying his charts while the professors were trying to interpret the messages that were blaring from the radio. Frumpy had his sextant, Ziggy had his telescope, and they were following the commands that were coming from the voice on the radio.

The person behind the voice was directing Frumpy and Ziggy to the stars. Captain Julian was plotting a course according to the commands coming from the voice on the radio, but the destination remained unknown. It all seemed very mysterious to the four spies. Once the professors and Captain Julian left the deck, Solamae, Puppy, Pee Wee, and Teeny went back to bed, empty-handed and more confused than ever. They were hopeful that the morning light would bring some clarity to what they had just witnessed.

Cold Weather



The next morning things were a lot clearer. The sky was a crisp, clear, dark blue and there was an unfamiliar chill in the air. Mrs. Big was feverishly knitting sweaters for everyone. According to Squall, they had rounded the tip of Argentina during the night. That was probably the reason for last night's stargazing and now, ice was beginning to form on the deck of the ship. It would be impossible to continue the spying expedition. Solamae and her friends could no longer sneak into the portholes since they were all frozen shut! Now what?

The foursome spent the rest of the day trying to come up with a new plan but, they were hampered by the fact that they were now grounded down below. It was just



too dangerous for them to attempt to walk on the slippery deck. Squall came below periodically to warm himself with some of Mrs. Big's Mexican hot chocolate. Lupita's family had generously shared the recipe with her in exchange for her Joe Frogger recipe. A big platter of Joe Froggers graced the center of the table. Were they expecting company?

Mr. Big was pacing the floor, glancing at his watch about every two minutes. Solamae signaled to Squall, "What's going on?" Squall looked bewildered, "Me don' no, some important meetin' accordin' to da scuttlebutt. Captain Julian gon make a 'nouncement, directly." Puppy's ears stood up, "How can we listen in?" she begged. Squall headed for the Captain's quarters, "Follow me den, I sneaks you in. Be very quiet." Solamae, Puppy, Mighty, and Teeny tiptoed quietly behind Squall. Once in the Captain's cabin, Squall positioned the four detectives in a corner behind some boxes and he reminded them, once again, by placing his finger over his lips and whispering, "Shussssh!"

Very soon, the Captain arrived along with the entire crew. They were all making small talk about the weather when suddenly, without any ado, Professor Frumpstern and Professor Zieghead appeared out of nowhere. It seemed as though they were about to divulge a portion of their plans. They were to be delivered in the form of a lesson about the planets. Mighty and Teeny were able to keep their excitement in check by holding their breath, but Solamae let out a little squeak and Puppy almost choked. Thank goodness, it was noisy in the room and no one noticed the four little snoops crouching in the corner.

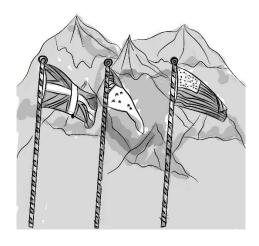
Frumpy began with the planet earth; "Our planet's Latin name, Terra, appears only in science fiction. Terrestrial is an adjective used to refer to land; it is the root of "extraterrestrial," the term for any life form that does not originate on earth." Puppy burst out, "Are these two from outer space?" Mighty and Teeny began to tremble, but Solamae calmed them, "Don't be afraid; there is no such thing as people from outer space. At least I don't think so!"



Then, Ziggy added a quote from Herman Melville: "A ship is a bit of terra firma cut off from the main; it is a state in itself; and the captain is its king." Solamae couldn't keep her opinion to herself any longer, "No wonder Captain Julian agreed to take them anywhere they wanted to go; they just crowned him KING!"

Ziggy was already on to the planet Jupiter, "Jovial means jolly. Medieval astrologers believed that the planet Jupiter has a convivial influence on human behavior." The foursome looked more confused than ever, no one knew what "convivial" meant, but Solamae said, "I think it must mean warm and fuzzy." The group readily agreed, "That sounds much better." Solamae tapped Teeny on the shoulder and asked him to sneak out and get some Joe Frogger cookies for them since it looked like they were going to be there for quite a while.

Outer Space



Teeny had a lot of explaining to do to Mrs. Big before she would agree to let him, or her cookies, out of her sight. He told her that they were playing just outside the mouse's house and reassured her, again and again, that they would *not* go up to the deck of the ship for any reason. She relinquished the cookies and sent him on his way once she was satisfied. Back in the Captain's cabin, the two professors were just finishing up their tour of the nine planets. By the time Teeny returned with the cookies, the spies were grumbling. No one could imagine what all of this talk about the planets had to do with the professor's



future plans. Puppy whispered to Solamae, "Are they going to take us to outer space?" Solamae just laughed, "Not unless they smuggled a rocket on board!"

Just then, Professor Frumpstern explained, "The alignments of the planets, combined with the Global Warming of the Earth, are believed to be responsible for causing the South Pole to experience unusual extremes in weather conditions." Solamae realized with a rush, "So, that's where we are; the South Pole!"

Professor Zieghead added some statistics: "The pole is one of the driest places on earth, experiencing only .20 inches of precipitation per year, but recently, it snowed there. On top of that, a record high temperature was recorded on the same day that it snowed! We will be assisting the meteorologists at the Amundsen-Scott South Pole station. "Maybe they really are scientists," Puppy exclaimed. Everyone wondered aloud, "Then why all the secrecy?"

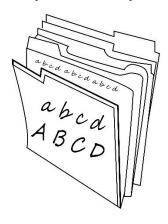
Ziggy continued, "They believe that it may have been the winds, which came from an unusual direction that day, which caused the weather phenomena and not Global

Warming. Frumpy interrupted him, as though to stop him from revealing too much about their true mission, "Tomorrow, we will say goodbye to you. We are releasing your ship and its honorable captain and crew from our commission. After tomorrow, you will be free to travel your own course." A rowdy "Hip, Hip, Hooray!" filled the cabin. Everyone hurried out to make preparations for the next leg of the trip, back to warm weather and the business of hauling cargo.

Solamae, Puppy, Mighty, and Teeny stayed behind. They were speechless and not at all satisfied with the professor's explanation of their secretive mission. This was the last chance that the undercover agents would have to find out what Frumpy and Ziggy were *really* up to. They would have to get into the professor's cabin that night and try to find something that would explain this puzzling turn of events. Solamae insisted on going in alone. It would be too risky for everyone to leave in the middle of the night, just in case Mr. or Mrs. Big were to wake up and discover them all missing.



Confidential Information



Squall, Mighty, and Teeny lay awake, waiting for Solamae to return. Puppy was standing guard just outside the professor's door. She was at the ready to rescue Solamae in case she was caught snooping. Once inside, Solamae could see the two professors sleeping soundly. Frumpy was in bed, but he was still wearing in the same clothes that he had worn the previous day and the day before. Ziggy was fast asleep in an easy chair with his glasses still perched on the top of his head. They appeared so harmless in their peaceful sleep and they were both snoring so loudly that it drowned out the sound of the papers that Solamae was shuffling through. She had

discovered a file lying on the professor's desk. The file revealed Frumpy and Ziggy's *true* mission!

Solamae riffled through the papers until she came across an official looking letter. The letter's seal was broken, so Solamae decided to read it. It was addressed to the "Esteemed" Professors Frumpstern and Zieghead and it was from the famous Russian scientist and quantum physicist, Sergy Zimov. The letter read:

"Dear trusted colleges, I find myself in a position to request your assistance, and I charge you to carry out this mission in the strictest confidence. I have the utmost faith in your ability to conduct the necessary research with the meteorologists at the Amundsen-Scott South Pole Research Station.

I am presently conducting a secret research project in Northern Siberia. I am attempting to recreate an ecosystem that disappeared 10,000 years ago, at the end of the Ice Age. I began the project in 1989 by fencing off 40,000 square acres of forest, meadows, shrub land, and lakes, which are surrounded by another 150,000 acres of wilderness. My theory is that filling the vast emptiness of



Siberia with grass-eating animals will slow Global Warming.

Wherever the animals graze, new pastures will appear. Tall grasses with complex root systems will stabilize the frozen soil, which is thawing at a dangerously increasing rate. In the summertime, the animals manure will nourish the soil, and in the winter, the animals will trample the snow that would otherwise insulate the ground from the cold. All of this will help to prevent the now-frozen ground from thawing and releasing the powerful greenhouse gases that are responsible for Global Warming."

Solamae read on, not understanding too much about the methane, carbon dioxide, and water vapor data that was reportedly being monitored by the U. S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, but one thing she did understand was the importance of the professor's mission and his urgent plea for secrecy. Solamae wondered what she should do now that this confidential information had been revealed to her.

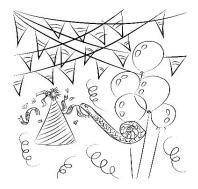
She glanced at the two professors who were sleeping so soundly and her heart overflowed. She giggled to herself when she remembered her first impression of the twosome: Professor Frumpstern's clothes all mismatched and wrinkled, as though he had traveled around the world wearing them; and Professor Zieghead appearing fidgety and a little dizzy-headed. Solamae began to laugh when she remembered what she had said about them at that moment: "It's going to be difficult to keep these two out of trouble!" That sure did turn out differently. Instead, it was the odd couple of professors who had kept her and the Bigs out of trouble. They had not only become an important part of the journey; the twosome and their silly ways had worked their way into everyone's hearts.

Solamae thought back to the day the professors boarded the ship for what was supposed to be a short ride to Costa Rica but turned out to be the adventure of a lifetime. She remembered how they had saved her, the Bigs, and the entire crew when the ship ran aground in the Galapagos Islands. She remembered how grateful she was for all that she had learned from them.



Frumpy and Ziggy had earned everyone's respect and admiration; they had been accepted as seasoned sailors. She was certainly going to miss her dear friends and she wished them success with their important mission to save the earth. Solamae glanced at the porthole and realized that morning was breaking; she would have to hurry back before Mr. and Mrs. Big woke up and discovered her and Puppy missing. She brushed past Puppy with a quick "thank you" and they both jumped under the covers and fell asleep as soon as they got home. In the morning she would tell everyone the news that she had gathered. Solamae knew what she should do.

The Truth



Solamae and Puppy slept until late the next day, despite everyone's attempts to wake them up. Squall was at his post when Mighty and Teeny came running to alert him; "They're awake, they're awake," they both cried out in unison, "They are waiting for you to get there before they tell us about what happened last night."

Once everyone was gathered, out of earshot of Mr. and Mrs. Big and the others, Solamae and Puppy were free to speak. Squall asked, "Wha' happen' in da professor's cabin lass nigh'?" Mighty and Teeny chimed in, "What did you find out?" They couldn't wait to hear the truth about what they now believed to be the evil Professor Frumpstern and his devious associate, Professor Zieghead. Puppy answered first, "I don't know anything. I stood



guard outside the door while Solamae snooped around inside. She fell asleep without telling me what she saw in there."

Solamae seemed distracted, as though she was still struggling with the truth. She was quiet for a long time. Everyone held their breath, waiting to find out what those two mysterious professors were really up to. Solamae looked serious; she took a deep breath, as though she was getting ready to speak. The anxiety in the group reached a peak. Suddenly, Solamae smiled her mysterious smile, shrugged her shoulders, threw her hands up in the air and exclaimed, "They *really are* scientists!"

Then she added, "That's the good news." Everyone was stunned; they were not quite sure that they could believe it, since they had had so many suspicions about Frumpy and Ziggy. Had their minds been playing tricks on them? Or, could it have been the boredom of the long journey that had led their imaginations astray? Was there more to this story?

Squall asked the question that was lingering on everyone's mind, but had remained unasked, "Den wha'

da bad news is?" Solamae smiled her prettiest smile and announced, "We have a party to plan!" Puppy cocked her head from side to side, as she did whenever she was bewildered about something, "What in the Sam Hill are you talking about? A party is not bad news!" It was the reason for the party that would enlighten everyone to the sad event. Solamae explained, "We have to say goodbye to the professors today. Don't you remember what they said yesterday? They are staying here at the South Pole to continue their research on Global Warming. Now, we can get back to warm weather and hauling cargo!" A big cheer rang out among the group.

Then Solamae added, wistfully, "I want to remind you of all of the good things that Frumpy and Ziggy brought into our lives. They are good people." No more was needed in the way of an explanation. The group hurried off to plan a going away party for the two dear friends who had given them so much. Solamae never breathed a word to anyone about the professor's real mission. There was no reason to reveal it. Solamae understood; the future of the planet was at stake.



Three Goodbyes



The party was just ending when someone from the research station arrived at the ship to collect the professors and their equipment and escort them to the research station. Ziggy mounted his snowmobile and took off in the wrong direction! While their guide was chasing Ziggy down, turning him around, and bringing him back, Frumpy was attempting to control his snowmobile. So far, he had been driving around in circles! Once the guide had everything somewhat under control, he led the twosome to the research station.

Everyone was laughing, but it was a toss-up as to which scene was the funniest: the two comical professors

zigzagging along the path until they were out of sight? Or, Solamae, Puppy and the little Bigs, who were layered in so many sweaters that they looked like little round onions waving goodbye from the deck of the ship? Suddenly, "Full speed ahead" came blaring over the loudspeaker. Captain Julian was sure in a hurry to get back to the normal routine. The merrymakers would have to get safely back below now that they were leaving the dock.

Once again restricted to the lower decks, the group would have to invent something new to entertain themselves with until the ship reached warm weather and the ice on the deck had melted. With no more spying operations to keep them occupied, Squall decided to share some stories about his hometown. In the evenings, after dinner, everyone would gather around Squall's cot and he would reminisce about all the wonderful times he and his hometown friends had had together.

All those happy memories were making Squall very homesick. For the first time since his arrival onboard, it occurred to him that his friends must have thought the worst when he was reported missing during the hurricane;



and they must have thought even worse when his overturned launch boat finally washed ashore without him in it! He would have to let them know that he was okay. He wanted to go back to his hometown and his friends. Maybe he could even get his old job back, once he explained the harrowing details of what had kept him away for so long. And, just like that, Squall resigned!

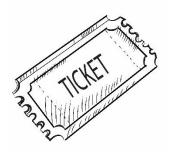
Everyone said that they understood, including Captain Julian, who told Squall that he would get him ashore just as soon as they were in sight of land. Mini had the hardest time with the news. Although she said that she understood, she would occasionally burst into tears at the mere thought of Squall leaving. It took Solamae several long, private talks with Mini to help her to accept the news about Squall's departure. After all, Solamae was in the same predicament as Squall, so she easily found the right words to describe the dilemma that he found himself in.

And then, the loveliest thing happened. Squall asked to speak to Mini, alone. He told her that he would never forget her or what she had done when they were stranded, without any drinking water, in the Galapagos

Islands. "Mini, you saved our lives! It was *you* who found the fresh water source on Santa Cruz Island." From that moment on, Mini would hold Squall forever in her heart and she would never, ever shed another tear.



Land, Ho!



As the sun rose the next morning, the words "Attention! Attention! All hands on deck," were heard coming over the loudspeaker. The Bigs knew this was serious, so everyone scurried up to the deck of the ship, leaving their half-eaten breakfast on the table and their chores unattended. Squall was at the center of it all. Land had been spotted way off in the distance. Warm air now engulfed the ship and the ice on the deck was now gone. Squall had an important decision to make, and it would all depend on Captain Julian's plans for the future.

"We will be heading back to the Atlantic Ocean and then north to the Caribbean Sea." Captain Julian's announcement was good news for Squall, for he was heading home. "The trip will take about two months; we

will be making several stops along the way to pick up and deliver cargo." Squall was not happy to hear that, as he didn't want to wait another two months to get home. However, Solamae *was* happy. The divide between her and her family was shrinking rapidly. She was very excited to be heading back to the Atlantic Ocean, where her journey had begun.

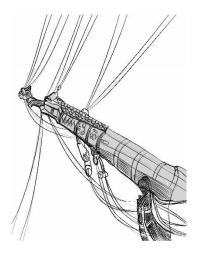
Captain Julian gave Squall two choices: Either stay on board with them until the ship reached the Caribbean Sea and his home, or jump ship at their first stop to pick up supplies on the southern tip of Argentina and make his way home much faster by land. Of course, Squall chose getting home sooner; he just couldn't leave his friends in suspense any longer than was necessary. He realized that his friends must be worried sick about him and it just wouldn't be fair to make them worry any longer.

As the land got closer, another party was already in the making. The crew took up a collection for their hero, Squall. They wanted to show him how grateful they were since he had done so much for all of them. Surely, he could use some extra cash for his trip north. Maybe he could buy



a train ticket or take a bus with the money, and then he could be home in days rather than a couple of months. Squall had a smile from one ear to the other as he waved goodbye to his friends and took off on foot. He would see them all again, in two months, when they got to the Caribbean, or so he thought. It would be many months before his friends would arrive.

Trouble



By early that evening, the ship had been fully loaded with all of the food, water, and supplies that they would need for their trip north. Captain Julian decided not to waste a night in port. They had a good distance south to travel in the channel before they reached the deep blue sea, then they could head far enough east of the coast to safely make the turn northward. They would travel north, along the eastern coastline of South America, making periodic stops along the way to pick up and deliver cargo. Once he had delivered those instructions to the night crew, Captain Julian was satisfied that they were back in business and



back on course. He went to sleep without realizing that they were already in trouble, again.

Late that night, the ship drifted off course and out of the sight of land. No one noticed because of the dark of the moonless night, but as the dawn broke, the crew realized that they had no idea where they were. They immediately sent for Captain Julian. "We did exactly as you told us," the crew insisted. "We don't know how this could have happened," one of them whined. "We never left our posts," they all persisted in self-defense.

Captain Julian immediately ordered a thorough inspection of the entire steering mechanism on the ship. "Bring me a full report," he demanded. He was worried, he certainly didn't need another catastrophe; they had barely recovered from the last one! Plus, his reputation as a competent captain was at stake. An ominous mood began to cover the ship like a dark cloud, as the news filtered down to the Bigs. Solamae had gone to sleep happy last night, but now, at the beginning of their journey, they were already lost, again!

The Bigs were all in a tizzy with the unsettling news, so Solamae decided to take her mind off her dilemma and to try to comfort the Bigs instead. "You know how Pee Wee is forever getting lost?" Solamae waited for someone to say something, but they were all too preoccupied. "Well, don't we always manage to find him?" No one responded. "Hello? Hello?" she quizzed repeatedly. It was as though everybody woke up at the same moment and all started expressing their fears. Most of the concerns were about Squall no longer being there to help them. Then Solamae reminded them, "We can find out what is going on by spying on the sailors and listening to the scuttlebutt, just like we did before we had Squall to bring us the news." Mighty and Teeny loved that idea. Happy to be back in the spying business, they got busy right away.

Once things had settled down and the dark cloud had lifted, everyone thanked Solamae for reminding them that they were okay and very capable of handling their problems on their own. Then she and Puppy went to their



favorite spot, the bowsprit of the ship, to ride the waves, to think, and to try to sort out this new development.

Lost At Sea



Solamae was more concerned than she let on to the Bigs, so she and Puppy put their heads together to try to figure out what they could do. All the while, the ship's crew was scurrying about; they were lowering the sails and quietly surrendering their ship over to the sea. There was a great sadness in the air. It reminded Solamae of how helpless she and everyone on the ship had felt the day that Sissy died. She thought about Sissy's funeral and a cold chill flew all over her; was this the end for them too? They were at the mercy of the swift current. There was no telling where it would take them, but it was obvious that trying to fight it would serve no purpose at all.



The broken steering mechanism that had rendered them powerless to direct their course, had been quickly discovered and was being repaired in the hope that something would reveal their location in the meantime. Even with the capability to steer the ship, they wouldn't know which way to go since no one knew for certain where they were! Just then, Mighty and Teeny appeared with news: "We searched the professors' cabin and we discovered some instruments that they left behind. Come quick and see!"

Solamae grabbed a pair of binoculars that the professors had forgotten to pack, and she ran back up to the deck of the ship. Night was falling, but she was sure that she could make out some sort of strange formation on the horizon. She shouted to the others: "It looks like land! Go get Mr. Big; he will know what to do." Mr. Big arrived in an instant and confirmed that it was possible that it was a land formation out there on the horizon. "We must alert the captain to raise the sails and aim toward it; perhaps it is another ship that could help us." Squall would have

carried that message to the captain with no trouble, if he were still on the ship with them.

No one knew for sure how Captain Julian would respond to discovering uninvited guests on his ship. They would have to devise a plan to let the captain know about their sighting without revealing their own presence on the ship, lest he might order an extermination that could rival that of the mean queen back at the palace. Everyone began to tremble at the thought of being discovered. They had nowhere to run, and nowhere to hide. They would be forced to jump overboard; surely, they would all drown! What to do? That was the big question on everyone's mind, but their fears had them paralyzed.

They had to get the captain's attention before dark. If they waited until morning, they might drift out of sight of the formation, whatever it was. Then Solamae thought of something that she believed would work. "The next time the captain steps away from the helm, I will place the binoculars there with a note that reads: 'Land Ho!' He will think that one of the crew left the note and the binoculars." Mr. Big agreed to Solamae's plan stating only: "Well, it's



worth a try. It's better than doing nothing." Mighty and Teeny went right to work monitoring the Captain's every move at the helm of the ship and waiting for Solamae's opportunity to sound the alarm. As soon as Captain Julian turned his back, Solamae dashed in with the binoculars and the note. She was in and out in a flash. Seconds later, "Land Ho!" was blaring over the loudspeaker. Success was theirs!

Magellanic Penguins



As the ship approached, thousands of penguins could be spotted in the water around the formation, which turned out to be a land mass. "Wow! Look at all those birds," Solamae exclaimed. Mighty and Teeny sneaked over to the helm to listen to what the captain and crew were saying about where in the world they were. They didn't know that the penguins would provide the clue. When they arrived within earshot, Captain Julian was telling the crew about the penguins. "Those are definitely Magellanic Penguins; see the white border that runs from behind the eye, around the ear and chin, and joins at the throat? They



are relatives of the Galapagos Penguins. Millions of them live on the eastern coast of Argentina, so we are not far off course.

Captain Julian called a meeting on deck in order to inform the crew of the new developments. Mighty and Teeny were once again on a covert assignment; it was their duty to eavesdrop on the meeting and let the rest of the Bigs know just what was going on. The two little snoops were safely in place under a lifeboat when Captain Julian began to explain what he thought had happened. "I believe that land formation is the Isla de los Estados. We must have drifted into the LeMaire Strait; that would put us in the Argentine Sea and not far off our intended route! The island is surrounded by minor islands and rocks. How we got through the strait without hitting any rocks is a miracle!

If we can spot the Puerto Parry Naval Station, I will be able to chart our exact location from there. The naval station is located on the northern coast of Isla de los Estados; it is the only settlement on the island, which is an ecological preserve. The four marines, who man the naval

station, are the only inhabitants. Otherwise, the population of the island is zero!"

Captain Julian raised the binoculars and took another quick glance at the shoreline, "I think I see the naval station now." The ship's engineer appeared at that moment and announced: "We have completed the repairs Captain Julian. We have steering capability." With that, Captain Julian turned the ship around and headed north, away from the island and any risk of hitting the rocks. He was pretty sure that he had correctly identified the land mass and that he had correctly calculated their whereabouts. It hadn't even occurred to him to question the mysterious appearance of the binoculars and the note. They were safe again, and Solamae and the Bigs could secretly take the credit.



Toninas



Now that they were safe once more, Solamae and Puppino spent their time daydreaming about all that had occurred and all of the new friends that they had made, from the time that they first met on the Italian mountainside. That proved to be a lot to take in since it had been more than a years' worth of travel, adventures and misadventures. Neither one of them could deny that meeting Squall was the best thing that *ever* happened to them! Of course, they wondered about Squall's friends Bingo and Tony and they imagined how happy those two orphans, and everyone in Squall's hometown, would be when he returned safely to his island home.

How could they ever forget meeting Guadalupe Rosita Josefina De La Cruz Muñoz Quintana (nicknamed "Lupita") and her seven Uncle Tios, and her forty-nine cousins, and all of her charming ways? Or, the mysterious appearance of Frumpy and Ziggy, the two absent-minded professors who saved their lives! But the thing that Solamae was the most grateful for was the little sea bird that had brought her the news about her parents.

While Solamae and Puppy idly reminisced, Mighty and Teeny were busy trying to gather information about Captain Julian's future plans. Captain Julian had maintained full speed ahead for several days now as he aimed the ship directly to the north. He was hugging close to the coastline of southern Argentina so as not to lose sight of land again. According to what Mighty and Teeny had overheard, they would be making several stops at ports along the coastline to pick up cargo that would be delivered to Buenos Aries on the northernmost coast of Argentina.

From there, they would load, according to the scuttlebutt, some unspecified "secret cargo" and then they



would make the trip nonstop from Buenos Aries to Rio de Janerio in Brazil. As the ship approached their first stop, Puerto San Julian on the southernmost coast, thousands of Magellanic Penguins like the ones on Isla de los Estados lined up to greet them like little ambassadors of the sea. Everyone ran up to the deck of the ship to see the majestic birds and to enjoy their stately overture.

The weather was warming up, so Solamae and Puppy made their way out to the bowsprit to relax. Once they were settled on the point, with their feet dangling and their faces catching the spray of sea mist, seven sparkling, black and white fish appeared in front of the bow of the ship. They cackled some familiar sounds and behaved like dolphin, swimming to and fro across the bow of the ship and popping up here and there, but they sure didn't look like the large, grey poppers in the Caribbean Sea!

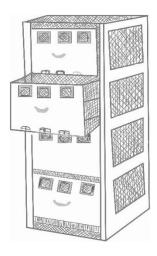
These were white with black fins and black noses. Solamae and Puppy were not going to risk shaking hands with them until they were sure that it was safe. Mighty and Teeny arrived just then; they had overheard the sailors talking about the fish. Mighty shared what he had

overheard: "Those are Commerson's dolphins, they are known locally as 'toninas' and they live only in the Argentine Patagonia." Teeny quickly added, "That is the southern part of Argentina; where we are now."

It seemed as though, overnight, things had returned to normal. They were all relaxed and enjoying whatever pleasures the long days would bring them in the way of adventure and excitement. It was peaceful again, but that would soon change with the arrival of some unannounced company. Until then, they had their new friends, the toninas, to keep them entertained.



Puerto Buenos Aires



The toninas followed the ship for several hours, until it made its next stop at Puerto Deseado. As the ship turned into the port, they cackled and waved goodbye. The cargo was loaded in less than an hour and the ship was once again heading north when the toninas suddenly appeared again; they had waited for their new friends just outside the harbor. Solamae and Puppy were having the time of their lives and by the time the ship reached Puerto Madryn, they had named all seven of the toninas.

Agustin was the largest and he seemed to be the leader; his wife was named Sofia and she was in charge of their three daughters: Gabriela, Constanza, and Juliana.

Their two sons, Leandro and Mauro, copied everything their father did, that is when they weren't frolicking with Solamae and Puppino. It seemed as though the toninas were intending to escort the ship all the way up the coast of Argentina, but before it reached Puerto Buenos Aires, they cackled and waved goodbye smiling their best smiles, then they jumped straight up out of the water and danced away on their tails!

During breakfast the next morning, Solamae and her friends the Bigs talked and laughed about their encounter with the toninas; they were amazed at the different personalities of each one. Agustin was strong and brave, he was always in the front leading the way, while the boys, Leandro and Mauro, roughhoused and delighted in teasing their little sisters, Gabriela, Constanza, and Juliana. Sofía kept a watchful eye on each of them all the while. What a beautiful family they made. They were carefree and happy with the entire ocean to call their home. Now, it was time to go up on deck; the ship was just pulling into the Port of Buenos Aires and Solamae and Puppy were planning to go ashore and spend a little time trying to gather information



at the Port Authority. Mighty and Teeny had offered to help since they were now expert spies themselves. The foursome jumped ship as soon as it docked; they would have to hurry.

Once they arrived at the busy Port Authority, they split up in pairs. Mighty and Teeny went snooping around in the file cabinets and Solamae and Puppy hid under the director's desk. They were hoping to overhear information about Solamae's parents. Suddenly, Captain Julian arrived in the director's office and the conversation centered instead on the mysterious cargo that they were planning to load onto his ship. It was a dance troupe of ten tango dancers with a five-piece band, and three singers accompanying them. Puppy asked Solamae, "Hey, remember the circus and the circus mice that came along with them?"

Solamae didn't know anything at all about tango dancers; she would have to do some research. Maybe there would be some tango mice coming along with the dancers, then they could all make friends. "Let's go tell Mighty and Teeny that we are going back to the ship to spy on the

sailors and to see what they have to say about tango dancers. They didn't know that the "master" tango dancer himself awaited them. Or, so he said.



The Guácharo



By the time Solamae and Puppy got back to the ship, their uninvited houseguest had the entire Big family practically hypnotized with his stories. He had snuck aboard while Captain Julian was at the director's office and the ship's crew was preoccupied with unloading cargo. He never stopped talking long enough for Solamae, or Puppy, *or anyone*, to get a word in. One thing was for sure, he was a braggart! He talked fast, didn't look anyone in the eye, and he never stopped smiling and laughing, which flashed his mouthful of gold teeth. Mini was already smitten with him; she was batting her long eyelashes as

she moved ever closer to him. Mrs. Big looked at him in complete wonderment. Mr. Big's eyebrows appeared to have knitted together. However, their uninvited guest kept right on talking. It was as though he pulled the stories right out of the air.

"My name is Don Francisco Fernandez Altuna y de la Peña, but you can call me Poncho! I am a direct descendant of the Royal Toledo Family that escaped from Spain during the bloody conflict between the Rodriguez and the Toledo families. I am a famous tango dancer! My stage name is 'Valentino.' I am from Buenos Aires, Argentina." He was wearing wide, calf-length trousers and a Mexican sombrero hat. He was the only tango mouse traveling with the dancers, but why was he dressed in spangled-leather gauchos?

Probably a native cowboy of the South American pampas, probably of mixed Spanish and Indian ancestry. Probably coming from the annual El Gaucho Championship in the Brazilian state of Rio Grande where he probably pretended to be a famous Gaucho. Whatever he turned out to be, Poncho was certainly entertaining.



Mr. Big motioned for Solamae and some of the others to step outside so that they could put their heads together out of earshot of their unwelcome guest. "Who is the gaucho amigo? Nothing about him fits together. His Mexican sombrero hat doesn't go with his gaucho pants, neither of which would *ever* be worn by a tango dancer, and he speaks Quechua, the language of the Incas." Mr. Big had heard tales of those banditos. "He is probably from Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil's most southern state; an orphan, a vagabond, or worse, a Guácharo."

Before anyone could ask, Mr. Big explained: "A Guacharo is an uncomfortable friend who has questionable taste and bad manners, and you won't get rid of him!" It was obvious that Mr. Big did not like the idea of Poncho barging in on them unannounced, but the others believed that Poncho might be able to help in the search for Solamae's parents, if he were asked. According to Poncho, he knew just about everybody of importance and he seemed harmless enough. So, it was decided that Don Francisco Fernandez Altuna y de la Peña could stay hidden

away with the Bigs for now, but Mr. Big was secretly planning to dump him at the next port!



The Dance Hall



Solamae wanted to ask Poncho for help, but she couldn't get a word in; he hadn't stopped talking long enough to take a breath ever since he arrived. Just then, Mighty and Teeny returned from the director's office with news about the remainder of their trip. Mighty began, "We are in for a long, long ride! We have to travel all the way up the coast of Brazil; northeast to the Tropic of Capricorn and beyond, then northwest to the Equator. We might have to stop in Sao Paulo for the tango dancers to perform there, before we go to Rio de Janerio, but we aren't sure about that." Then Teeny added in a sad, disappointed voice, "We don't know where to look for clues about your parents in those cities."

That caught Poncho's attention, he was always at the ready to brag about all of the important people that he knew and to offer his expertise on any subject that was at hand. "I am friends with the mayors of Sao Paulo and Rio de Janerio! Once I tell them about your problem, you can consider it fixed." Then came Poncho's boldest brag, "They would do anything for me."

Solamae wanted desperately to believe Poncho's promise, but she had serious doubts about him and his abilities. After all, she had spent almost two years and traveled two oceans and thus far, not much news had been gathered about her parents. Poncho just made everything sound too easy; it was as though he wanted everyone to believe that there wasn't anything in the world that he couldn't do.

Solamae and Puppy had a plan; they would spend as much time as possible with Poncho during the next leg of the journey. It would probably take a day or more to reach Sao Paulo and Rio de Janerio; they could pry a lot of information out of him during that time. Puppy was darting off to recruit some help, "Let's get Mini to help us,



she will be full of questions about her new hero!" Of course, Mini loved the idea of spending time with her heartthrob, Valentino, so she agreed to be part of the plan.

They would need to begin right away; that is, as soon as they could locate their subject. "Maybe he is taking a nap, he must have tired himself out with all that talking," Solamae surmised. "Let's go look below." When the threesome finally caught up with Poncho down in the ship's cargo hold, he was twirling around, dancing back and forth across the room, throwing his head back before changing direction each time. He had an imaginary partner dancing with him; he was quite the sight, a real-life Valentino!

Mini jumped right in with her big eyes and her prettiest smile, "Will you teach me to tango, Poncho?" "Yes, I am the best tango dancer in the whole country." No one expected any less from that showoff, he was certainly the best boaster in the whole country! Poncho turned out to be a pretty good dance teacher after all. It wasn't long before Mini had replaced his imaginary dance

partner and Solamae and Puppy were following right along too.

They spent the whole afternoon in their little dance hall having so much fun that they forgot about their plan to interrogate their new friend. Poncho had a way of making you forget all your troubles. He would promise you the moon, and even if it turned out to be an empty promise, it was nice to take a break from your troubles once in a while.



Porto de Santos



Early the next morning Solamae and Puppy went to the bowsprit to watch the ship's approach to Sao Paulo. According to Poncho, Porto de Santos was the largest and busiest port in South America. He also said that it was a good distance from the port to the Mayor's office. He had overheard the sailors say that it would be a short layover; they were only going to spend a couple of hours in Sao Paulo. It would be impossible to get to the city and back to the ship in time. The ship would leave the dock as soon as the tango dancers returned from their matinee performance. As a result of the short layover, none of the Bigs would leave the ship, it was too risky. Although Mr.

Big did make an unsuccessful attempt to convince Poncho to make a run for it; he was secretly hoping that the impostor would not make it back to the ship in time. Then they would finally be rid of him.

Solamae and Puppy were disappointed not to be able to go ashore, so they decided to invite the rest of the Bigs to spend the afternoon in their make-believe dancehall. When the family arrived down below, they could hear beautiful tango music and singing coming from the dance hall. It was the five-piece band, and the three singers who were accompanying the tango dancers; they were practicing for their matinee performance.

Before long, the dancers arrived for their dress rehearsal and the Bigs were treated to the most spectacular tango performance of their lives! Once the dance troupe was rushed off the ship for their show, the Bigs spent the next couple of hours practicing the dance steps that they had learned. Mr. and Mrs. Big were gracefully gliding across the floor, Poncho and Mini were dancing cheek to cheek, and Solamae and Puppy were laughing and having great fun dancing. Everyone was dancing the tango and



having a wonderful time, until they felt the motion of the ship leaving the port. It would be a short trip to Rio de Janerio where they would part ways from the dance troupe and load the cargo for the next leg of the trip. Mr. Big was once again secretly hoping that they would also part ways from Poncho!

Poncho *really* wanted Mr. Big's approval. He had tried everything to impress him, but until now, nothing had worked. Poncho knew that if he could just discover some information about Solamae's parents, *all* of the Big's would think of him as a hero. This would be Poncho's best opportunity to impress Mr. Big and hopefully to win him over. He needed a plan. He did have a friend named Tito who worked in the records department at the mayor's office; perhaps Tito could find some record of Solamae's parents.

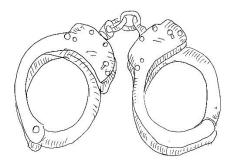
Maybe he could talk Mighty and Teeny into joining him; he could use their help spying around in the mayor's office. Oh, and Mini too! Poncho knew that she would do *anything* for him. Let's see, who else could Poncho use to get what he needed? Solamae would surely come along,

after all, it was her parents they were looking for, and Puppy would follow without hesitation.

Poncho deviously rubbed his chin as he took an inventory of the remaining little Bigs. There was Ustabe, but she was too nosey; she would probably figure out that Poncho had his own motives and then she would tattle to Mr. and Mrs. Big. There was Wanabe, but his feet were too big; he would leave footprints everywhere and someone would notice and catch them spying. PeeWee! Of course, he was always up for an adventure, but Poncho would have to keep an eye on him so he didn't get lost again. Time was running short; they would be in Rio de Janerio by morning. Poncho would need to recruit his helpers without Mr. Big finding out. It was time to put his plan into motion.



Poncho's Demise



Poncho approached each of his potential recruits while Mrs. Big, Ustabe, and Wanabe were busy preparing dinner. One at a time he would whisper, "Psst, come over here" his gold teeth sparkling like fishing lures. Then he would motion them to go outside where he would masterfully sell them on the plan. They would meet on deck at dawn as soon as they arrived in Rio de Janerio, before Mr. and Mrs. Big awoke. He would tell his recruits that they had Mr. Big's permission to go ashore with him; none of them would notice that Ustabe and Wanabe were left behind.

Then, Poncho would leave a note for Mr. and Mrs. Big promising to be back by dinnertime. He would say that all seven of them had gone to the beach for the day and he

would tell them not to worry because he had many friends in Rio de Janerio. Poncho was confident; even boasting to himself at how easy it was to convince the others of his devious plan. Little did he know that his plan was unravelling at that very moment.

Mighty and Teeny were squabbling about who would be the first to discover important information about Solamae's parents and, as usual, their argument had gotten quite loud. Ustabe overheard them from the next room; so she secretly planned to follow the group when they sneaked off the ship the next morning. She was determined to find out what they were up to.

Ustabe had no choice but to include Wanabe in the morning chase when Wanabe caught her listening to the argument. Together they were planning to shadow the seven little sneaks. Snooping on the snoops was now their main mission in life. It turned out just as planned by both parties; the snoopers and the snoopees were off the ship at the crack of dawn without attracting any attention. Ustabe and Wanabe were now in hot pursuit of the "sneaky seven" as they were now referred to.



Things began to go awry almost immediately. PeeWee had wandered off when they passed an airplane museum so Ustabe had to go search for him. That left only one snooper, Wanabe, to keep up with the remaining six snoopees, which quickly proved to be an impossible task when Poncho split the group up. Mighty and Teeny were assigned to search the filing cabinets, Solamae and Puppy were told to sneak into the mayor's office and eavesdrop on his conversations.

Mini would remain with Poncho as they went office to office seeking his friend Tito. Wanabe ran frantically from one office to another trying to follow all of them at the same time. She was leaving huge footprints everywhere, until the building's maintenance man became weary of cleaning them up. He caught Wanabe by the ear and led him off to the mayor's office to be seriously reprimanded. Now there was six.

Solamae and Puppy were quite surprised when Wanabe was brought in to the office in handcuffs! They wanted to defend him even though they could not understand why he had shown up there or how on earth he

had gotten there. Just then loud screams were heard coming from down the hall. "Eeeek! Ratoncitos!" Two secretaries who were in the process of filing documents had uncovered Mighty and Teeny in the filing cabinet.

They were captured by the building's security officer and marched into the mayor's office in handcuffs! The mayor was growing tired of their antics, these three unwelcome visitors had disturbed all of the workers in his office and they had caused a raucous in the entire building. It was time to put a stop to it! Solamae and Puppy didn't know what to do; things were getting worse by the minute and Poncho was nowhere to be found. They were all in big trouble.



Caught



Mighty, Teeny, and Wanabe broke down in tears when Mr. and Mrs. Big arrived with Ustabe in tow. She had run home to tell Mr. and Mrs. Big that PeeWee was lost again, and they had squeezed the rest of the truth out of her. None of them had gone to the beach; it was all a lie contrived by Poncho and now Mighty, Teeny, and Wanabe were under arrest and PeeWee and Mini were missing!

Solamae and Puppy decided to make a run for it before Mr. and Mrs. Big noticed them; they had to find Poncho and make him face the music. After all, it was clear that he had lied to all of them too. Now it was his turn to be punished. They ran out of the building so as not to attract the attention of the security officers. Then they

peered into all the windows, hoping to locate Poncho or his friend Tito.

"Turn around, Solamae." It was Puppy who spotted him first. When Solamae turned to face the surrounding gardens, she couldn't believe her eyes. There was Poncho sitting peacefully on a bench, eating ice cream with Mini and Poncho's friend Tito. They all looked as carefree as a day in the park! It was obvious that none of them were aware of the panic that was going on inside the building. Solamae told them how angry Mr. Big was, "His eyebrows go all the way down to his nose!" After hearing that, Tito offered to go in first and try to calm the situation. So, the foursome braved the storm while Poncho sat on the bench in the peaceful garden and finished eating each of their ice creams.

Tito had a difficult time convincing Mr. Big that Poncho meant no harm. "He was trying to impress you, Mr. Big; he wanted to win your approval. Poncho is an orphan; he does not have a father to call his own. You are important to him and he respects you a lot." This was beginning to tug at Mr. Big's heart. It was the mayor who



finally convinced Mr. Big that Poncho meant no harm, "I know him for a long, long time. He is a good guy. He helps others whenever he can. Although, he is not above stretching the truth in order to impress someone; that is how he gets himself into trouble. Everyone thinks he is a braggart." Mr. Big wasn't entirely convinced; he did not like being lied to under any circumstances.

Solamae and Puppy were forlorn; they just stood there looking pitiful. The three prisoners: Mighty, Teeny, and Wanabe had stopped crying, but their faces couldn't hide how guilty they felt. Mini didn't say a word, she didn't have to; everyone knew that she was just following along without giving the situation a second thought.

Ustabe had already cleared her name by coming clean with Mr. and Mrs. Big from the get-go, and it was obvious that Wanabe was just trying to help. That left PeeWee to locate and Poncho to deal with, but they would have to find PeeWee first as it was getting dark. Mr. Big made peace with the mayor. He apologized for all the commotion his family had caused during the past few

hours and he promised to have them pay for any damages that they had caused.

Mr. Big thanked the mayor and Tito for all that they had done to reunite his family. They would surely find PeeWee before they got back to the ship; he was probably still wandering around in the airplane museum. If Poncho didn't make it back to the ship in time for departure, well too bad. Mr. Big was not going to be sad about it.



Forgiveness



When the reunited Big family reached the ship, they discovered Poncho in the kitchen. He was devouring a platter of Joe Frogger cookies that Mrs. Big had baked that morning and he seemed completely unaware of how much trouble he had caused. "Where have you been and what have you been up to now?" Mr. Big demanded. "I have been in church, praying for your forgiveness. Oh, please try to understand why I lied to you." Poncho was his usual talkative self; he was not letting anyone get a word in edgewise. However, when Mr. Big spoke up, the entire room, including Poncho, fell mysteriously silent. It was a though they all knew that Mr. Big was about to deliver a very important lesson.

"Practicing forgiveness does not mean accepting wrongdoing." Everyone gasped, does this mean that Poncho would have to leave? Poncho looked scared; for the first time in his life, as he had nothing to say for himself. After a long pause, Mr. Big continued: "So, although I do not accept the fact that you lied to me, I will forgive you." As everyone in the room breathed a sigh of relief, Poncho suddenly remembered the information that his friend Tito had given him. "Tito said that someone named Irish had inquired about the ship and was planning to meet it when it returned to the Caribbean. Mini told him that Solamae had an Aunt named Irish and that it must be her because she had tried to meet the ship the last time it was in the Caribbean, but the storm had prevented it."

Solamae didn't know how she felt about that news. On one hand, she longed for news about her parents; on the other hand, she wasn't sure that she wanted to leave her new life as a sailor. Being a cargo ship mouse was full of adventures and Solamae loved learning new things and meeting new friends. Then she remembered how much Puppino and Hector would like to see each other, and she



couldn't bear to deny them that pleasure. Perhaps her parents had sent a message with Aunt Irish telling her that they were safe back at home in the palace and that they had given her permission to pursue her new life as a cargo ship mouse. After all, they should be the first to understand how much fun she was having since they too had been cargo ship mice. But that was before she was born. The best news that Solamae's Aunt Irish could deliver was that her parents had safely returned to their little hole in the wall at the palace.

Mr. Big interrupted Solamae's daydream when he announced: "This morning I overheard the captain saying that we have reached the Tropic of Capricorn. He said we still must travel a good distance northeast, up the eastern coast of Brazil, before heading northwest along the northern coast of Brazil at the Equator. From there we will head to Venezuela and then to the Caribbean Sea where we began our adventure with Squall. Perhaps we can locate him when we arrive at his island home." Mr. Big's eyes pierced Poncho when he added, "At least Squall never caused any trouble."

Lies



Things quickly returned to normal once the ship was under way. Solamae, Puppy, Poncho, and the Bigs were all settled in for a long, uneventful journey to the Caribbean. The family reminisced about the events that had taken them full circle around South America and back to where they first encountered Squall clinging to his overturned launch boat in the stormy Caribbean Sea. Stories about Squall, everyone's hero, captivated the whole family all of whom could hardly wait to see him again. All but Mini; she had developed a new love interest. The infamous Poncho had captured her soft heart with his flowery words and his empty promises. No one could convince Mini that Poncho was a scoundrel, so the family decided to let Poncho dig his own grave; they all knew



that, sooner or later, Poncho's lies would surely catch up with him.

This day had begun with Mini discovering a note under her pillow. She proudly read the exaggerated portrayal that Poncho had contrived. It was all about himself and about how important he thought he was. Poncho had grown tired of hearing about Squall and how wonderful he was. "I am the most distinguished and notable dignitary of the Royal Toledo Family. The light from last night's bursting full moon could never compare to my magnificence."

He went on and on, promising her the very moon and stars! Solamae remembered that she had looked up at the moon the night before and noticed that it wasn't full. She whispered in Mini's ear so as not to embarrass her in front of the whole family. Mini was puzzled, "Poncho, I don't think that the moon was full last night." But Poncho stuck to his barefaced lie, "Well, you must have missed it. What time did you look?" And so, it went, on and on, with Poncho slipping out of the net each time it was cast.

It was going to be a long and boring ride with no stops planned at all. Mr. and Mrs. Big were settled in their easy chairs happy to have a break from all of the excitement that Poncho had caused. They were keeping a watchful eye on Mini though; they didn't want to see her fall prey to believing Poncho's unrealistic imaginings. He could certainly conjure up a good tale and mesmerize everyone into almost believing him, but they all knew better.

It was only the boredom of the long journey that provided Poncho with an audience; after all, he was entertaining. It wasn't his fault that he didn't have a proper upbringing, and he was really enjoying the attention. He spent the days spinning detailed stories with twists and turns and weaving his grandiose lies like giant spider webs. Poncho was shameless, and falsification was his specialty, but somehow everyone understood. Mr. Big had set the example of forgiveness and Solamae had explained to everyone how awful it would be not to have parents to teach you how to behave.



Adiós Amigos



Days later, Mr. Big approached Poncho about something that Poncho's friend, Tito, had told Mr. Big in confidence. Mr. Big was determined to dash Mini's crush before she had her heart broken so he asked Poncho to explain about Adita right in front of Mini. Poncho was cornered, "Adita Maria Bernadetha de la Santa? She is still waiting for me at the hacienda? She has told everyone that she will love me forever and ever and ever?" Poncho took a deep, long breath, "Oh, now that you mention her, I remember that I also love her forever and ever and ever!" Solamae would have her work cut out for her later; trying to sooth Mini's hurt feelings.

Poncho started packing his bags immediately. He would leave in the morning when the ship reached the dock in Caracas, Venezuela. To everyone's surprise, Mini was not at all upset. Now that they were back in the Caribbean she was looking forward to seeing Squall. As for Poncho, getting to Venezuela had been his plan all along. The next morning, he was gone. He left a note with just two words on it, "Adiós Amigos!"

Captain Julian didn't waste any time unloading the cargo at the port in Caracas, he was glad to be back in the clear, calm waters of the Caribbean Sea. Hurricane season had past, and the Grenadine Islands offered a wealth of island trinkets that could be sold in foreign countries for a big profit. It was just a short hop north and a little to the east and then he could begin his search for Squall who would provide him with the local artisans' Caribbean treasures: T-shirts, shells, and island jewelry.

Solamae, Puppy, and the Bigs were happy; peace had returned to their household and everyone was breathing a sigh of relief now that Poncho wasn't there weaving his wild tales and stirring up trouble. Things had



returned to normal just in time; now it would be up to Solamae and her sidekicks to dig up some information about Aunt Irish's looming visit. Puppy had masterminded a plan to get her and Solamae off the ship as soon as it docked in the morning. They would go directly to Squall. He would know how to find the information that they needed.

Without Poncho there to distract them with his foolishness, Solamae, Puppy, and the little Bigs were back in business. But, all they had to go on was what Poncho had told them and who knows if any of that was true. Besides, Solamae wasn't sure how she felt about it, she wanted to get some news about her parents' whereabouts, but she feared that her sailing days might be coming to an end soon.

That Poncho! It was as though he never left. Just by dropping a few words about Aunt Irish, he had Solamae thinking about her parents and Puppy thinking about Hector. But, how could he have known that Solamae had an Aunt Irish? "It must be true," Solamae wished aloud, "Maybe she will be standing on the dock when the ship

arrives in the morning." Puppy was as confident as usual, "Well, I know what we need to do, just in case she's not standing on the dock tomorrow."

Puppy had another great idea, they both needed to forget everything for a while, "We're already in the channel, Solamae, look how good the waves are. Let's go out on the point and look for Poppers." They spent the rest of the afternoon doing what they loved, riding the waves with the sea mist in their faces. It had been a long time since they had seen Squall. Solamae was really missing him and could hardly wait to see him again. She wondered if he had changed in the months since she last saw him. She and the Bigs were in for quite a surprise when, *if*, they made it.



Wedding Plans



Before daybreak the next morning, Solamae grabbed on to Puppy's tail and the two of them jumped onto the dock as the ship approached it. They had scribbled a note to Mr. and Mrs. Big telling them that they would return as soon as they had located Squall. When a quick inspection of all of the tourist ships that were tied up at the dock did not produce Squall, they headed to Mr. Seafus Dayvus' house.

On the way, they saw Bingo and Tony with two big ice cream cones. Tony called out to them, "Hey mon, how ya ben doin?" "We're looking for Squall," yelled Solamae, "have you seen him?" Bingo answered, "Ya mon, him gettin married tomorrow!" Puppy called out to them,

"have you got any more ice cream?" It was as though not a day had passed since they had seen each other.

"Where is he?" Solamae asked tearfully. Puppy had that forlorn look in her eyes and she was tilting her head from side to side like she did when she was confused. Bingo answered in between licks on his ice cream cone, "Dems at Squall's house. All da friends of Squall helpin to fix up da house for da newlyweds!"

"Is Mr. Seafus Dayvus there too? Solamae inquired. "Yup, everybody dere. Dems takin a break right now." Tony reported, Squall give us money ta buy ice cream for all da workers. Come on wit us, we get you ice cream too." Puppy perked up, "Okay!" and the gleam returned to Solamae's eyes.

As they walked along the dirt road to Squall's house, they got all their questions answered. Squall had gotten his job back on the tourist cruise ship where he met and fell in love with Dezirae. She was the new cook on the ship that Squall worked on and she was famous for her great cooking. Some of her specialties were: "Stew Fish and Grits" for breakfast, delicious "Lobster Salad" for

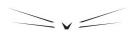


lunch, and "Barbeque Ribs, Cole Slaw, Rice and Beans, and Conch Fritters," that are as tasty as Seafus Dayvus' are, for dinner. Everything that Dezirae cooked was delicious. Squall was getting a wonderful wife who loved him very much. He would never be alone again. This news made Solamae and Puppy feel so happy.

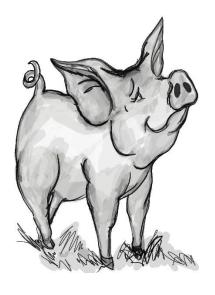
When Squall saw them walking up the road, he hollered and ran to meet them. "Wha happen? I expect you here months ago." Before she even asked about her Aunt Irish, Solamae told Squall that Captain Julian wanted to place a large order for Island trinkets and that he could make some money for the wedding if he went to see him straight away. She and Puppy would wait at the house and help with the fixing up and catch up with all their friends.

After Squall left, Solamae asked Mr. Seafus Dayvus, "Have you heard anything about my Aunt Irish? She was supposed to be coming to the islands." Mr. Dayvus said "No, but I know who might no sometin 'bout it. You go down to da authorities in town and ask for Ozzie. I con leave 'till Squall come back, but I come fetch

you when he do. Run along now young'ins, dems close early dis day. Tell Ozzie I send you to beckon him help."



Porketta



Puppy darted out the door before Solamae could think of any more questions. "Come on, Solamae, we have to hurry before they close." Along the way to town, Puppy chased some chickens off the road and into the woods. She was hidden in the brush when Solamae heard her yelp! And then, another yelp! And another! Solamae called out to her, "Puppy? Puppy? Where are you?" She dove into the bushes and came face to face with a wild boar! It was the biggest pig Solamae had ever seen, and it looked hungry. Puppy was in trouble, she was pinned between a large tree trunk and a rock. There was no escape for her.

Solamae took a deep breath and made herself feel big. Then, she made a loud growling sound and threw stones at the giant pig. Now the pig was really angry. She had been looking forward to some dog meat for lunch. Instead, she would have to settle for a little mouse. Puppy slipped out of her grips while her head was turned away. She scooped up some sand and threw it in the pigs face. The next thing they heard was a blood curdling, snorting, squeal. "Run, Solamae, run!" Puppy hollered.

Solamae knew this was serious. She had heard those words before. Those were her mother's exact words, that night at the palace. The night that her life changed. But, there was no time to think about that right now. The twosome had some serious running to do if they were going to get away without being eaten by the pig! They headed straight out of the woods and toward the road.

Neither Solamae nor Puppy had taken a breath. They could still hear the pig snorting and squealing, so they ran some more, all the way to the authorities and straight into someone's arms. "Sometin' chasin' you? You both look a fright." It was Ozzie, just the person they



needed. "No, we had a run-in with a giant pig!" Solamae panted. "Oh, dat jus Porketta!" Ozzie laughed, "she jus showin' off, she don' harm nobody." Puppy offered, "Well, she had us fooled. We thought she would have us for lunch!" Solamae had a guilty look on her face, "Oh, I hope she's all right. We'll have to look for her on the way back and tell her we're sorry for being so mean to her." "No need for dat," Ozzie confessed, "Porketta jus havin' fun wit yuz! Now, what you come to beckon?"

Solamae took Ozzie's hand in hers, "Can you help me?" Ozzie's eyes were kind and caring, "Of course I hep you, what you seekin'?" Puppy spoke up since Solamae was about to cry, "Was there a lady here looking for Solamae? Her name is Irish, she is Solamae's aunt." "YES!" Ozzie exclaimed, "She was here last week, she left a letter for you. I will go and fetch it." Solamae almost jumped out of her skin, "Oh yes, please and thank you."

The Letter

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Ozzie left to fetch the letter from the filing cabinet, and he was back in a flash. "I never did expect dis letter to find you, so I filed it away, but here you be and a happy day is it!" The threesome broke into a happy dance before Solamae opened the letter. Solamae read the letter aloud, and she was fighting back her tears as she did.

"Dear Solamae,

Your parents sent me here to meet you, but once again, I have missed you! They want me to bring you back to New York with me, although, we all know that you are a happy cargo-ship mouse. They want you to know that



they are okay. They are living on a big farm near the palace. They are waiting to go back to the palace where you all lived. They don't think that you would like the farm life as much as you like sailing and they want you to know that if you would like to stay on the ship with the Bigs until they can move back to the palace, it's okay. They are sure that you will be safe with their good friends, Mr. and Mrs. Big."

With love, Aunt Irish.

Solamae shouted, "WOW, that's perfect. I can stop worrying now that I know that my parents are safe and sound, living on a quiet farm, and that they have given me permission to continue sailing." Puppy said, "High five, Solamae." Ozzie added, "Blessin's Solamae, I is happy for all you." Peace filled the air. Solamae had not been this content since she lived in the palace. She no longer had to wonder about her parents' whereabouts. She no longer had to worry about giving up her new life as a sailor. She could sleep well tonight knowing that her parents were safe and happy, and she could enjoy the adventures that lay ahead.

"Thank you, Ozzie. Will we see you at the wedding tomorrow?" Solamae inquired. "Ya mon, da hole island be comin." Just then, Mr. Seafus Dayvus arrived to thank Ozzie for his help and to hurry Solamae and Puppy back to Squall's new/old house where they were planning a party. And, just like that, Solamae and her pal Puppy were off, ready for the next adventure.

By the time they reached Squall's house, the party had already begun. There, standing at the door, was a proud and happy Squall. He was greeting all the colorfully dressed Islanders who were arriving with baskets full of goodies and gifts for the bride and groom. Calypso music, steel drums, laughter, and wafts of delicious food filled the air. Solamae could only imagine how beautiful the wedding would be with all these wonderful preparations going on.

Meanwhile, Captain Julian was already planning his next journey, more good news for Solamae. They would be heading back across the Atlantic Ocean where their journey had begun. He was hoping to make a big profit on the hand-made crafts, shells, and trinkets that he had



purchased from the Islanders. Captain Julian was expecting his hungry European customers to gobble them up, so he was not wasting any time getting underway. They would push off the dock at first light.

Dilemma



Early the next morning, Solamae cried out, "We can't miss Squall's wedding! What are we going to do?" Puppy didn't know how she would do it. "Don't cry, I'll find a way to stop this ship! I already have an idea and I don't need any help." Then she ran away. "Where are you going?" Solamae lamented, but Puppy was already way out of sight. Puppy ran straight down below, where the sails were kept. I know, she thought, we can't sail without a mainsail! I have strong canine teeth. She looked around until she found the mainsail folded up in the corner. Puppy had to burrow way into it to find the place where the sail connects to the mast of the ship. She chewed and chewed



at the ropes until, *Viola!* She headed back to Solamae, while licking her chops to moisten them.

Solamae was still drying her tears, when Puppy arrived and made the announcement, "Let's get ready for a wedding. It won't be long before the crew realizes that we will not be sailing today." The crew were all happy when they did realize that the sail would need to be repaired; even Captain Julian was glad to go to Squall's wedding.

The music had already begun, and it could be heard all over the island. Two or three different bands, all playing at the same time, made for some heavenly sounds. Solamae remembered something that Squall had told her, a long time ago, when they were going to the jump-up. She could almost hear his words, "Dems dat miss da jump-up, miss a big part of dem's life." She was sure that he would say the same thing today, about his wedding, and she knew it was true. "Let's go see how the wedding plans are coming along."

When they arrived, they saw Dezirae standing outside at the wooden table used for cleaning fish. She was

wearing shorts and a t-shirt, and she had a red knit turban artfully wrapped around her head covering-up her hair. Her dark skin shone in the morning light. Solamae quickly inquired, "Why are you cleaning fish? It's your wedding day!" "Our guests each bring their specialty dish. Dis gonna be for my specialty dish, stew fish and grits." Puppy knew immediately that her choice for dinner would be Dezirae's famous stew fish and grits.

Once the meal preparation was completed, Dezirae disappeared to her room to get ready for her wedding. She appeared in a beautiful white dress, her hair braided with colorful flowers. She paraded to the church, on foot, with her bridal party and a band escorting her. She sparkled as she walked down the aisle in the crowded church, toward Squall, her wonderful husband to be, waiting for her at the altar.

And, just like that, Squall had himself a wife! But, bitter news was on its way. Word came during the party, the sails were repaired, the ship was waiting and ready to go. Solamae felt that it was better to slip out quietly; this was no time for sad goodbyes. It was dusk by the time



everyone reached the dock. The sky was still red, but the sun had long gone to sleep, swallowed up by the sea.

The "red sky at night, a sailor's delight," should have signaled a peaceful day of sailing the following day. But, as they pulled away from the dock, scuttlebutt about the mysterious waters of the Bermuda Triangle filled the air. Planes, ships, and people had disappeared in the Bermuda Triangle, never to be found or heard from again, with no good explanation and without leaving a trace.

The legend is that these 500,000 square miles in the Atlantic Ocean were part of "Atlantis," the lost civilization, a powerful civilization that one day, over 11,000 years ago, had mysteriously disappeared underneath the sea. They had no choice but to sail right through the Bermuda Triangle. It was the only way to get out to the deep blue sea and on to their next destination.

Peace



Solamae wasn't sure when she had first noticed that the ship was changing direction, but now, the crew seemed alarmed about something. There was a big scurry on deck. Something must have happened to the ship. Sails were coming down fast and the ship had circled around and was now going in the other direction. Solamae found herself feeling melancholy, all the scuttlebutt about the Bermuda Triangle had her a little nervous. She hoped that they weren't caught in it. *I wish Squall was here, he would tell us what's going on*.

Solamae and Puppy waited, what seemed like an eternity. Finally, Wanabe brought news that he had gained by spying. Part of the boom had broken off and fallen into



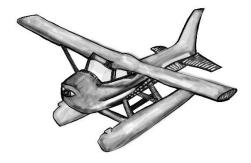
the water, so they circled back to the spot where it broke and dropped the anchor. Tomorrow, they would dive for it. That meant that they would lose a day, or maybe two days, just anchored out there, nowhere. At least they were back in the Caribbean Sea. Maybe some poppers would come around to play, or a little sea bird might arrive with another note taped to its leg. After spending endless hours out on the bowsprit gazing over the vast sea, nothing had appeared except beautiful sunrises and sunsets. Pink clouds, pink sky, even the sea looked pink sometimes. Being surrounded by pink was like being engulfed in love!

That evening, Wannabe brought an update on the crew's progress, there wasn't any. They were having trouble locating the broken boom, and they sure weren't going anywhere without it. Tomorrow, they would take the lifeboat and continue looking, further away from where the ship was anchored. Hopefully, they would find it early in the day, so it could be fixed before nightfall and they could continue on their journey. It had been days, with nothing but her hopes and dreams to think about. All

that thinking made Solamae realize that she was happy right where she was, knowing that her parents were safe and that they approved of her sailing. Maybe she would be seeing them soon.



The Seaplane



Solamae had resigned herself to another long day filled with daydreams, when she heard the engine of an airplane in the distance. As it approached, she could see that it was a seaplane and it was coming in for a landing! She ran to alert all off the Bigs and got back up to the deck of the ship just in time to watch it land. Once the plane was on the water, it could be operated like a boat. Just as the plane was nearing the ship, a loud screech, like grinding metal could be heard. Solamae saw it happen, the propeller came loose and fell into the water. Solamae thought she saw something glistening near the center of the propeller as it was coming apart. It turned out to be the bolt that holds the propeller on!

The pilot pulled up next to the ship, while Solamae, Puppy, and the Bigs watched from under the lifeboats. The pilot called out to Captain Julian, "Ahoy, Captain, well it appears that we both have a problem! We noticed you anchored out here and thought that you might be stranded. Everything all right?" Captain Julian reassured the pilot. He explained that they were waiting for repairs to be completed and that there really wasn't anything that anyone could do to speed up the process. Captain Julian and the pilot briefly discussed the damage to the plane.

Captain Julian reassured the pilot that his crew would recover the propeller and help to reattach it, just as soon as they returned from diving for lobsters. He invited the pilot and his co-pilot to lunch, "The crew has been spending their time diving for lobster while they wait for the repairs to be done. Lobster is in abundance here!"

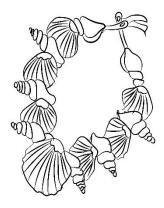
They learned a lot about each other during lunch, it turned out that the co-pilot was the pilot's wife. She was a very wealthy woman, who had made her fortune in the fashion industry. She had boutiques in all the large cities around the world: New York, London, Paris, and Milan.



She wanted to buy the trinkets that Captain Julian had rounded up, to sell in her fancy shops. Of course, Captain Julian agreed right away. This was doing it the easy way. *But, what would that do to their plans?* Solamae thought. Only time would tell.

Until then, the pilot and his wife were busy making plans to have several boats come and pick up the cargo of trinkets. Captain Julian was busy with the repairs to the boom, and everyone else was busy devouring delicious lobster. Wanabe brought the news; the boom was finally repaired and ready to go. Unfortunately, it would be tomorrow morning before the boats would arrive to unload the cargo. It would take a few hours to unload and then, they could be on their way again. Captain Julian had decided to continue across the Atlantic Ocean to pick up cargo that he had scheduled to haul. Solamae was longing to be closer to her parents. She wished out aloud, "I hope the boats get here early."

Trinkets



The next day passed without any boats showing up to unload the cargo, so the ship couldn't leave. The boom was repaired on the ship, the propeller was safely reattached to the plane, and everyone was anxious to get underway and well out of the Bermuda Triangle. So many things had gone wrong already, and no one was able to explain them. The boom on the ship breaking, the propeller falling off the plane, and now, no boats showing up to take the trinkets. Solamae wondered why the rich lady didn't just pay Captain Julian to deliver the trinkets to her in Europe. It sure would be easier than unloading them and then, having to load them on her ships. *Oh well*,



she thought, maybe there is more to that lady than anyone knows.

Solamae and Puppy rounded up the rest of the little Bigs to start a spying campaign on the pilot and his mysterious wife. They were determined to find out how she made all that money, and why she expected everyone to wait while she made plans to suit herself. The entire group, Solamae, Puppy, and the Bigs, including Mr. and Mrs. Big, slipped into the Captain's dining room to spy on the lady. She was different, all right! She was very business-like, always counting her money and giving people orders. Solamae could tell that none of the crew liked her very much; they never smiled at her or asked her if she needed anything. They were sure that she would let her needs and wants be known with her next command.

Captain Julian, always the gentleman, was doing his best to make her and her husband feel at home. He even gave up his cabin to them and slept in the crew's quarters. The lady and her husband were always talking about the stock market, while Captain Julian just sat there. He had no need of such things, he was a hard-working man and

well satisfied with his life, just as it was. No amount of money could buy the things that Captain Julian valued. Then, the lady said something that no one on the ship would ever forget. She looked straight at Captain Julian, as though she was trying to explain her focus, only on money, and she said, "Every crisis is an opportunity. Some choose to stay crying. I am the one who goes out to sell handkerchiefs." Maybe she was bragging about what a good businesswoman she was, but it didn't work. It just made everyone like her even less.

Captain Julian responded, and everyone held their breath. "It's a beautiful day, why don't we go up on deck and enjoy it?" "Yes, let's do!" her husband readily agreed. He too was weary of all that money talk. Once the threesome had departed, the group made their way back up to the deck and they hid in their usual spying place under the lifeboats. They were listening to every word. Captain Julian seemed to be trying to get the lady to talk about her childhood. She was flattered, but Captain Julian's real purpose was to figure out what made her the way she was. She talked about being very poor as a child



and having to scrape for even the basics, food and shelter. Captain Julian had the perfect answer, "No matter how bad life treats you, never forget to love others."

The Bermuda Triangle



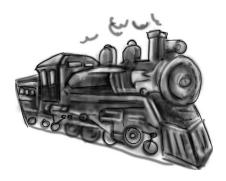
It was well after lunch when the boats and crew finally arrived to offload the cargo. Everyone was getting uneasy. For some reason, the scuttlebutt had again turned to the legend of the Bermuda Triangle. They were already in it, and no one felt sure that it wasn't the reason for the many problems that they were now experiencing. Mr. Big said, "At least we will be lighter and therefore, we can go faster as we make our way across the huge Atlantic Ocean." Solamae was glad to hear that, she couldn't wait to get closer to home. She worried, "Mr. Big, will you know how to find my parents?" "Don't worry Solamae, they are just fine."



By the time they were finished unloading and had gone, it was dusk. The pilot and his wife were getting the seaplane ready to take off. Captain Julian was at the helm of the ship, ready to go just as soon as the plane was in the air. At last, progress! They took off and the pilot circled around a couple of times to tip their wings and say a final goodbye. The crew was raising the anchor as the plane flew away. Sails were going up, but the sea had picked up quite a bit and seemed a little angry to Solamae, as though it was trying to stop them. "What in the Sam Hill is going to happen next?" Solamae lamented. Puppy just shrugged and tilted her head from side to side.

"Let's go out on the point while we are still in the Caribbean." Puppy was still hoping that the poppers would come out and play. "The waves will be fun, come on Solamae." They both hated leaving all their friends in the Caribbean and they both dreaded the thought of traveling through the Bermuda Triangle.

Bugland



Night fell suddenly. It was eerie. The water became as calm as a sheet of glass. A dense cloud engulfed the ship and there was no moonlight. Solamae couldn't tell the sky from the sea. Nothing was moving, including the ship. The wind died, and the sails went flat. Once again, they were at the mercy of the sea. They would wait all night for the wind to come back, but it never did. As morning broke, the ship began to vibrate. Solamae, Puppy, and the six little Bigs ran toward the bow of the ship to try to see what was happening. Just as they reached the bow, the ship spun around and around in a circle and a gentle wind lifted Solamae up and plopped her on the Polar Express!

James Bond was operating the train, and he reminded Solamae a lot of Mighty Big, because he had big



muscles. He called out to his sidekick, who was seated next to him and who looked a lot like Pee Wee Big. "Pull the whistle Timmy!" "Okay" and the train's horn sounded. All the passengers sang out, "Choo, choo." Among them was a Hermit Crab, and Solamae thought her skinny little feet looked just like Mini Big's, and a Puppy who had Teeny Big's big blue eyes, and Solamae. The train began to vibrate violently and came to a screeching halt throwing everybody from their seats and out of the train in slow motion. "What was that?" Puppy yelped.

They had been hurled into the future. "We're in Bugland!" announced Solamae, "I've read about this place." Hermit Crab added, "There's a giant, killer, Sabretooth Woodlouse on the loose!" With that, the Woodlouse appeared. She had a nose as big as Ustabe Big's and a hump on her back, and a loud, evil voice. "You're right!" she growled, "And you are invading my land!" then she chased them deep into Bugland.

The Woodlouse was eating everything, and she was gaining power. Solamae had an idea, "How about we put chemicals in her food?" Hermit Crab agreed, "I've read

that chemicals are pretty poisonous to a Woodlouse." Puppy had her doubts that chemicals would work, "I really think it will make the Woodlouse gain power." Solamae couldn't wait, "I'm doing it!" Then she stirred the chemicals into the Woodlouse's food.

"Here she comes!" They all yelled and ran away. "Chemicals?" she snarled, "These will make me really powerful!" The Woodlouse ate up all the chemicals and then she fell asleep. Everyone tiptoed back to peek at the Woodlouse, "IS SHE DEAD?" The Woodlouse arose with a roar, "No! You just gave me more power!" She chased them as they ran screaming. Now they were even deeper into Bugland.



The Fiery Phoenix



A Fiery Phoenix, with brightly colored feathers, was lurking about. Solamae noticed that he was watching everything from a distance. He was circling around, keeping a close eye on them, all the while. But, no one else seemed to notice the Fiery Phoenix even though there was a golden aura, that appeared like flames, radiating from him. Solamae whispered to herself, "His feet are gigantic; they look just like Wannabe's."

Just then, Timmy broke Solamae's dream-like state with a plan to destroy the Woodlouse. He and James Bond had come upon her sleeping in the woods. "Let's throw dynamite on it James Bond." Bond answered without hesitation, "Let's do it!" They pelted the Woodlouse

repeatedly with dynamite, which she ate, and ate, and ate. Timmy and Bond inched over to check on her, wondering aloud, "IS SHE DEAD?" The angry Woodlouse rose up from the ground like a bolt of lightning, "No, I'm not!' she screeched. "But you gave me a stomach ache and now, you will pay!" She chased Timmy and Bond back to where the others were hiding.

Suddenly, the Fiery Phoenix made a grand entrance, swooping in on the group, chasing the Woodlouse away, and offering his help, "How about we work together as a team to defeat the Woodlouse?" James Bond shouted, "Whaaa Hooo!" Hermit Crab added, "I think that's a really good idea." Timmy said, "I agree." Bond summed it up, "Let's do it!" All the while, the puppy had been wondering, "Who are you anyway?" "I'm the Fiery Phoenix! I'm here to save you all." Timmy asked him, "How are you going to get us home?" Solamae interrupted before the Phoenix could answer, "We can think about the plan to go home later."

The group headed deep into the Bugland woods, in search of the giant, killer, Sabretooth Woodlouse. On their



way, Phoenix instructed them, "Let's capture her in this net." Puppy said, "I'll round her up" and went off to scare-up the Woodlouse and lead her toward the group of hunters. The Woodlouse appeared out of nowhere. Hermit Crab chased her around, trying to capture her in the net. Everyone shouted suggestions to Hermit Crab "Over here, over there!" but she could not catch her. "I can't do this anymore, here you go Solamae." Solamae got the net over the Woodlouse's head on her first try. "I got you!"

Once again, everyone asks, "IS SHE DEAD?" But the Woodlouse was not dead, she begged for forgiveness, "I'm ever so sorry" and she tried to bargain her way out of trouble, "I'll fix the train if you let me come back with you. Please, I'll be good from now on." The Fiery Phoenix cast a good spell on the Woodlouse, "Abrar cadabra! Shazzam!"

Then, James Bond offered an invitation to the reformed Woodlouse, "Why don't you come home with us? And you too, Fiery Phoenix." Everyone got back on the train. Timmy pulled the whistle. Solamae rejoiced, "Let's party!" All the passengers sang, "Yahoo! Yahoo!

Celebrate good times, come on! Let's celebrate good times. There's a party going on right here, let's all celebrate and have a good time. Yahoo! Yahoo! It's a celebration."

And they rode off into the mist.



Rainbow Land



Once the train was engulfed in mist, Solamae closed her eyes. Her life passed before her: "I am Solamae, an adventurous little mouse girl. And I'm in search to find my kind and caring parents, who told me to flee. I really have no idea why they told me to flee but I reckon it's a pretty important reason. All I remember of their voices are "Run Solamae, run!" I always thought it was because of a problem, but, who knows. I now wander the streets, alone, tired, and hungry."

Suddenly, a likely mouse hole came into plain sight and Solamae knocked. The mice there fed her, gave her a place to sleep and in the morning, they kicked her out! The next night, she found a pizza box for dinner. The pizza left

was moldy. But, it was the only food she had for weeks. So, she ate it anyway. Then, she walked down a rainbow path. It was the night after she ate the moldy pizza that she had found lying in a bin. A huge RAINBOW LAND was ahead of her, Solamae felt a tiny bit curious.

It turned out to be a sugary wonderland! After she ate half of it, a massive unicorn jumped down from the clouds showing its beautiful silver mane and tail. Solamae's face suddenly lit up very slowly. She walked around with the unicorn, so called "King Sparkles II." And did you know? He made a fantastic tourist guide!

"Welcome to my kingdom, I am King Sparkles II." He seemed very cheerful. He even sang her a song that he wrote to introduce himself: "I used to be a Prince, but that was years ago... Now I am K-I-N-G, King! S-P-A-R-K-L-E-S, Sparkles! I learned to fly from my Mum and play tiddlywinks from my Dad. Now I am K-I-N-G, King! S-P-A-R-K-L-E-S, Sparkles! Solamae thanked him and then, he summoned three little unicorns, "Glitters!" The Glitters immediately appeared. "We're here!" King



Sparkles asked the Glitters, "Please show Solamae around."

Glitter number one said, "Okay! Here are the Candy Cane Mountains." Glitter number two said, "Here is the Rainbow Volcano that shoots out rainbows." Glitter number three said, "And finally we have the King's castle on top of a candy floss cloud." Solamae's eyes widened as she looked around. "Wow! This is amazing!" King Sparkles proudly stated, "As you can see, we unicorns are hard-working."

Without any warning, the ground started shaking and then, there was a big explosion. King Sparkles exclaimed, "We're under attack!" When the rumbling stopped, everything became perfectly still; it was so quiet that the crickets could be heard chirping. King Sparkles responded, as though he knew who was responsible, "Ruby Lava that's your cue!" An evil voice could be heard from a distance, "Oh right! I'm Ruby La..."

Solamae interrupted the evil voice, "It took you long enough!" Ruby Lava was annoyed, she cleared her throat and continued, "As I was saying, I'm Ruby Lava

and I intend to take over this planet! She screeched a loud, evil laugh. "WAA HA HA!" Everyone screamed, "Arghhhh!" They all ran for their lives. Ruby Lava could still be heard with her evil laughing, "WAA HA HA! I'll be back, but in person."



Tiddlywinks



When the dust settled, one of the Glitters tiptoed back, "Is it safe?" King Sparkles assured him, "Yes." So, everyone came back to Rainbow Land. King Sparkles wanted to entertain his new friend Solamae so, he told her about all his special talents, "Did you know I like to fly backwards on my head? While doing cartwheels and spinning on my horn! I'm also especially good at Tiddlywinks." Glitter number one reminded him, "I beat you at Tiddlywinks once." King Sparkles shushed him, "Yes, but that's private."

Solamae was happy, "I love Tiddlywinks. Can we play a game?" King Sparkles said, "Okay." The sound of the chips clinking into the glass could be heard all over

Rainbow Land. They played Tiddlywinks for hours on end until, King Sparkles cautioned them, "Alright, that's enough! We could be under attack at any moment, but you played very nicely." Glitter number one told Solamae, "We like to make cakes." Glitter number two added, "That is, when we're not under attack from a fire demon!"

Solamae recalled, "My mummy used to make me cakes. I wish she were here now. My favorites were mini mouse cakes." King Sparkles comforted Solamae and Glitter number three patted her kindly, "Don't worry, Solamae, we'll bake some cakes together when all of this is over."

"We need to defend ourselves. Got any ideas?" asked King Sparkles. Solamae suggested, "Hide in a hole?" "You're a mouse, you're small enough to hide, but we can't." The three Glitters had a brilliant idea, "We could build a magical bubble gum defense shield, and the missiles will bounce off of it!" King Sparkles approved, "Brilliant idea Glitters, you're quite good at this being under attack business aren't you!"



Solamae wondered, "How will it work?" Glitter number one explained, "I can blow the biggest bubble gum balloon ever and it'll form our defense shield." He catches a bubble gum raindrop and begins to blow a balloon large enough for all of them to hide behind. "It's going to pop!" Solamae warned. "No, it isn't." King Sparkles reassured her, "The Glitters are professional bubble gum blowers, they won't let us down."

They blew and blew until, presto! It was done. Then, they all hid behind multi-colored balloon. "Now we are protected." Solamae proclaimed, "We can see what's behind the wall." Together, Solamae, King Sparkles, and the three Glitters went walking down the road, safely hidden behind the magical bubble gum defense shield.

Mini's Peak



The group walked, safely hidden behind the multi-colored balloon, until they entered another world. "Hello, my name is Mini. This is the top peak of Mount Everest. It's great fun because of all the snow up here." Solamae noticed that Mini was rather short, "I may be small, but I am mighty." He too, had written a song to help him introduce himself, "My name is Mini, and this is my peak. I love it dearly. I love my guitar, yet cricket and cycling just about beat it. My name is Mini, and this is my peak. I love it dearly. De Dum, Di Dum, Du Dum, De Do, De Do, De Do. Mini lifted a huge barbell with heavy weights



attached to it. He pressed over one hundred pounds with no problem!

King Sparkles spoke first, "I am King Sparkles II and this is Solamae." Mini welcomed the group "Hello King Sparkles and Solamae. What do you think of the view?" King Sparkles was trembling and trying to catch his breath, "It's difficult to enjoy the view when you're shaking with fear. Did I mention that I'm afraid of heights?" Mini made him laugh with a joke, "No, but here's a tip, don't look down!"

There was a low, rumbling noise and the ground shook. Everyone dove out of the way. Mini grabbed a hunk of rock to hold on to while dangling on the side of the mountain. King Sparkles was clinging to Mini's foot. Solamae was clinging to King Sparkles and everyone was screaming "Arrrgggghhhhh!"

Glitters warned the group that something was falling. "So it is. I got it!" Mini held up the rock he had caught with his bare hands, thinking it was snow. "This sure is heavy for a snowball. And dry. And rough. I'm beginning to think it isn't snow after all. What do you call

a rock that can fly?" King Sparkles was not in the mood "This is no time for jokes." But Mini pressed on, "I thought that we need a good laugh now more than ever." He begged King Sparkles "Can I just finish it?" "If you must" But he was still clearly annoyed. "What do you call a rock that can fly? A rock-et! It's a rock, not a snowball that I'm holding."

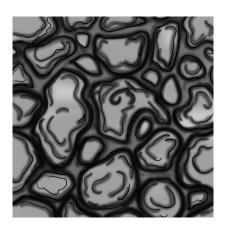
Solamae wanted to join the fun, "Me, me, I've got a joke. Knock, knock." King Sparkles answered reluctantly, "Who's there?" "Boo," quipped Solamae. King Sparkles took the bait, not realizing that he was the brunt of the joke "Boo who?" "You are a little whiner, aren't you?" Solamae had succeeded, even King Sparkles was laughing at her joke, "Never mind about whining, I will die if I have to hold on for any longer." The Glitters wanted a laugh as well, "You just whined again! Do you need a whining sticker chart?"

Just then, the hunk of rock that Mini was clinging to fell away and he exclaimed, "Why are we going up rather than down? Did Sir Isaac Newton have it all wrong?" "Hang on" King Sparkles added, "This is what happened



when I entered this world. I saw stars, then I saw this world, then I saw a magma world, then I saw what looked like the center of the earth, and finally I saw a world with a sign saying, DINOTOPIA." As they entered another world, Mini agreed, "I'm seeing the same, except for my land, of course. Cool! I love adventures."

Magma Ville



A deep voice called out to them "Welcome to Magma Ville. Who are you?" He sounded a little shocked. "I am Solamae and these are my friends King Sparkles II, Mini, and the Glitters." "I am W8 and I am glad someone came into my land. Most people don't like magma, so they don't come into my land." Mini quickly asked "Why don't they? It looks cool!" King Sparkles exclaimed "Duhhh? It is full of magma." "Yeah, I know that, but magma is epic." King Sparkles wasn't having it, "You're crazy, and it is dangerous." Mini flew right back at him, "Just because you are a wussy, doesn't mean everyone is."



Solamae decided that she had better break up the argument, "People, may we respect each other please?" Mini and King Sparkles reluctantly agreed. "All right." The Glitters asked W8 "Can you show us around Magma Ville?" "Of course! Here are the volcanoes. Luckily, they only erupt every ten years. When they *do* erupt, I put a force field around my house and me. The magma river never floods, and the magma never stops flowing.

Suddenly, a young girl appeared. She was wearing a grey trench coat and hat, and she held a spyglass in her hand. Her name was Beatrice, and she too, had a song that she had written to introduce herself, "I'm secretive, I'm a double bluff. I never know when enough is enough. My favorite food is Pop Cakes. There are no rules; I just do what it takes. No one knows my identity; no one knows what it's like to be me. No one sees the real me, no one sees the things that I see. I am a spy. When you're a spy, you're invisible. You have to know how to keep your cool. Ruby Lava thinks I'm her best friend, she doesn't know that I'll win in the end. No one knows my identity; no one

knows what it's like to be me. No one sees the real me, no one sees the things that I see. I am a spy."

She moved about gracefully, examining everything around her with her eyeglass, including W8. "What type of 'droid are you?" she asked. "I am a W8 Unit." Mini loved it, "Cool I've read all about them. Apparently, they are very fast, and they can talk their way out of anything. Also, they are very good at the game of cricket!" Solamae suggested "How about a game of cricket?" "Good idea" Mini chimed in. "Me and W8 vs. you lot?"

The clickity clack of the cricket bats and balls almost drowned out the evil voice that could be heard in the distance. "Don't go into the next land because you will die! WAA HA HA!" The ever-brave Mini suggested, "Shall we risk it?" W8 said, "I think we should, she might be lying." Solamae agreed, "He might be right you know." Everyone agreed, then the evil voice could be heard fading into the distance, "I am right you know, WAA HA HA!"

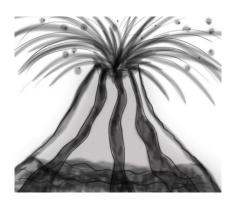
W8 remembered something from yesterday, "It is great to have you here, but it is funny to have visitors two days in a row. Yesterday I saw a fire person looking



around whispering mischievously." Beatrice's ears perked up "Sounds like an evil villain to me." King Sparkles announced, "Beatrice is curious about everything." "I am a Spy!" she responded, and everyone chimed in "She's a Spy! She's a Spy!" But, they weren't so sure that they could trust her.

Solamae could hardly wait "Yippee! Another adventure." W8 asked, "Can I come with you and your friends Solamae?" "Of course, we always need help on an adventure." Beatrice thought that they should wait 'till morning "We might need some sleep before we go." W8 invited everyone "You can sleep in my house if you want." Everybody except W8 found a spot and curled up on the floor. "Thanks, W8, but why do you sleep standing up?" "I can't lie down!" They all slept until "Cock-A-Doodle-Doooooo! Cock-A-Doodle-Doooooo!" They piled out the door of W8's house, still rubbing their sleepy eyes.

Center of the Earth



The group of friends whistled down the path to their next adventure without any thought of what they had heard the evil voice saying from a distance, while they were in Magma Land. They also hadn't noticed how dreary the atmosphere had become. The sky had darkened, and things had gotten eerie. There was a peculiar odor in the air; it was damp and stale. A low rumbling sound could be heard up ahead, it looked like orange, red, and yellow strobe lights were flashing dimly. Everyone wondered out loud, "Where are we?"

Suddenly, the evil voice that could be heard in the distance yesterday, spoke very loudly: "I'm Ruby Lava!



We are in the center of the earth. It is 5,982 degrees Celsius. The ground is an eerie green. Lava flows in orange, red, and yellow. There are colossal volcanoes towering above. The weather is stormy, and the clouds are made of lightning. WAA HA HA!"

The ground began to shake violently. The colorful flashes of light were brighter now. Steaming hot lava was slowly rolling toward them. Everyone dove away from the flows of lava into the wall. King Sparkles quickly took charge of the situation and asked the Glitters, "Would you be so kind as to bash the wall down?" "Of course, we will."

"NOT SO FAST!" It was the evil voice. Everyone screamed in a panic. The unicorns started bashing the wall down when suddenly lightening flashed. All three of the Glitters collapsed. While King Sparkles, and the others comforted the fallen unicorns, Ruby Lava's evil laugh could be heard, way off in the distance, "WAA HA HA!"

Mini looked around "Was that one of you?" "No," King Sparkles was still wrapping rainbow belts around the unicorn's wings. Solamae called out to the evil voice, "I don't get why you laughed." Mini broke the silence that

followed, "She dashed off to the volcano. She was so happy she made a storm." Just then, the rumbling started again. W8 asked Solamae, "Was that you this time?" "No, that's the sound of the volcano." King Sparkles helped his unicorns get up. "You'll be better soon." Everyone joined in, singing, "Ho, Ho, Ho, happy days! But, the angry evil voice of Ruby Lava stopped the celebration, "Won't you ever get it?" Solamae called out "Get what?" W8 proclaimed, "It wasn't me!" So Solamae asked King Sparkles, "Get what?" "I didn't say anything." Mini chimed in, "Don't ask me, I didn't!"

Beatrice. the spy walked, out of the volcano and close to them. W8 warned the group, "Everyone run. It's a baddy!" But Beatrice reassured them, "No need to panic. I'm one of the good guys." King Sparkles didn't trust her, "She's tricking us!" "Maybe she's not," Solamae replied. Beatrice tried again to calm their fears about her, "Listen, she wants to make volcanoes." The ground was rumbling even louder now. "Yeah – that," Beatrice pointed out. "But why?" everyone asked. "To take over the world!"



No one noticed Ruby Lava swirling around in her colorful flowing dress. She gestured as she whispered, "Spy, Spy. Come over here." Beatrice walked over to her and just then, the wall crumbled down. W8, Solamae, Mini, King Sparkles, and his three unicorns dashed out. Ruby Lava and her spy followed them.

Dinotopia



They walked, in a dreamlike state, until they came to a river. Everything had taken on a creamy glow. Solamae remarked, "Oh, look at that! It's a bridge made of eggshells. Mini was the first to answer, "Let's walk across it." W8 heartily agreed, "Good idea." As they crossed the bridge, King Sparkles noticed, "Look at that sign over the gateway, it says DINOTOPIA." Beatrice had seen them walking through the gate, so she greeted them. "Hello, this is Dinotopia. Solamae answered, "This is amazing! Look at all those dinosaurs." King Sparkles remarked, "Wow, look at that waterfall." And Mini pointed out, "Oh, and look at those volcanoes."

W8 asked Beatrice, "There's all the volcanoes, and waterfalls, and dinosaurs but, where do you live?"



"Follow me and I'll show you." Everyone agreed, so they all followed Beatrice into her big thatched house. "Here we are." They all stared blankly, wondering the same thing, when King Sparkles asked, "It's a bit dull isn't it?" Solamae added, "Is it cozy in there?" W8 followed with, "Has it got a spaceship to go with it?" And Mini wondered, "Does it snow around here?" Beatrice could hardly keep up with all the questions, "No it doesn't have a spaceship to go with it, and yes it does snow here, but not very often."

W8 noticed some colorful goodies on a table in the corner, "What are those over there?" That got everyone's attention. "What those?" asked Beatrice. "They are Pop Cakes." "Pop Cakes? What *are* they?" King Sparkles asked. "Well, Pop Cakes are cakes that pop a different flavor each time you have a bite. Do you want one?" "Yes please!" Everyone agreed. "Here you go." Solamae took her first bite of a Pop Cake, "Oooh, this is yummy I'm getting a hint of rhubarb, and now I'm getting a hint of ginger. Oh, that's hot!"

Mini had a slightly different reaction to his first taste of one of Beatrice's Pop Cakes, "Mmmmm delicious! I'm

getting the taste of gummy bears. Oh, wait, now I'm getting a taste of sausage." "I'm tasting some very weird flavors in my Pop Cake" said W8. "Oh, it's logically impossible, but I'm tasting radish and carrot ice cream! Who knew that something so weird and wonderful could make ice cream so disgusting?"

King Sparkles wanted to save Beatrice's feelings, "Oh these cakes are most peculiar." "I am taking that as a compliment so, thank you," she replied. Beatrice went to answer a knock at the door. It was Ruby Lava! "Hello everybody." Everyone gasped. Beatrice closed the door, but the knock came again. It was her! "Don't worry, I'm good now." Mini wanted to believe her, "Phew, that's good to hear!" However, King Sparkles wasn't so sure. "Shall we risk letting her in?" Beatrice thought it was okay. "Yes, we can, she said she was good." There stood Ruby Lava, in all her innocence.

Solamae asked, "Can we go and look at the dinosaurs now?" "Can we? Can we?" W8 begged. Beatrice had been looking forward to introducing everyone to her dinosaur friends, "Yes we can! Ruby

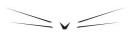


Lava, do you want to come?" "No thank you, I think I will stay and admire the view from here." Beatrice replied, "Okay" and everyone walked outside to meet the dinosaurs.

"Everybody, meet Bingo, Bango, and Bongo. Or, is it Bango, Bongo, and Bingo?" Solamae exclaimed, "Wow those dinosaurs are so beautiful." "Look at that one, it has wings!" W8 pointed out. Mini cooed, pointing to another, "Awww, that one is so cute." King Sparkles added, "Oh yes, that one looks proud, a bit like me!" The dinosaurs were all busy munching on leaves when Bingo spoke, "Wow, these leaves are very tasty." Everyone was shocked. "They can talk?" Beatrice laughed, "Yep!"

Then, Bango spoke, "Have you brought any pop cakes for us Beatrice?" "Oh, sorry I forgot." Then, Bongo asked Beatrice, "Who are these friends that you've brought along with you?" "These are my friends Solamae, King Sparkles II, The three Glitters, Mini, W-8 and, obviously, me. Sorry I didn't introduce you." Bongo wasn't satisfied, "Cool, but didn't you tell us that you used to work for someone called Ruby Lava? Isn't she here?"

"Yes," Beatrice replied, "She is here, but she didn't want to come so she's at home. Speaking of Ruby Lava, we'd better go and check on her."



Meanwhile



Back at Beatrice's home... "WAA HA HA! They don't suspect a thing, Now, what in here looks valuable that I could break? Oh, those vases look valuable." CRASH! Them, she held up a beautiful crystal bowl and smashed it on the floor. "WAA HA! Now, I think I will scatter some of that wood all over the floor! And now, I will eat those Pop Cakes and drop crumbs all over the floor. Wow! I wasn't expecting that! I taste vinegar and now I'm tasting toasted marshmallows. I better leave this land before they get back!" Ruby Lava ran all the way back to the center of the earth.

The others returned to find Beatrice's disheveled house. "What on earth happened here?" Beatrice cried. "Where is Ruby Lava?" Solamae asked. "All the pop

cakes are gone!" W8 moaned. Mini exclaimed, "Who did this?" King Sparkles thought he knew the answer, "Is anyone else starting to think that Ruby Lava was bad all along?" Everyone agreed, "Yes, definitely!"

Suddenly, it got very eerie. A dense cloud engulfed them. Once again, a gentle wind lifted Solamae up and spun her around before plopping her back on the bow of the ship! Puppy was at her side, acting as if it were just another day. The six little Bigs were there, and it was as if not a minute had passed since they were standing there together before.

It was as though Solamae had been there all along. No one asked Solamae where she had been. Solamae thought about it for a long time, before she decided to approach Wanabe. He was the only one missing on the Polar Express. Maybe he could solve the mystery for her. "Wanabe, why weren't you on the Polar Express? Why did you stay behind?" He didn't answer, he looked puzzled.

The deep blue sea and sky were clear again, they had traveled out of the Bermuda Triangle. The winds had picked up and all seemed back to normal, until Wanabe



asked, "What are you talking about Solamae?" Solamae had her answer, or did she? She couldn't be sure. Then Wanabe added something that Solamae would never forget, "Sometimes I like to pretend that I can fly like a Fiery Phoenix. Is that what you're talking about, Solamae?" So, it was possible, Solamae thought, but now, I will never know for sure.

The Atlantic



Solamae knew what the deep blue sea meant. It meant that she wouldn't be seeing the glistening waters of the Caribbean Sea again, for a long, long time. Captain Julian was crossing the Atlantic Ocean to pick up cargo and deliver it to its scheduled destinations It was a big undertaking, but it would bring her closer to her parents. It would also help to get her mind off the Polar Express and all the strange lands that she had visited. Just thinking about it made her dizzy.

Puppy suggested going to find out what everyone else was up to. They found Mighty and Wanabe bickering. Mini and Teeny had their own project that they were working on. That left Ustabe and Pee Wee. Ustabe was like a big sister, she wasn't very much fun. But, Pee Wee,



well he was always up for an adventure, and he would be happy to get out from under Ustabe's watchful eyes. They went below to look for Pee Wee.

Mr. Big was busy, but Mrs. Big was stationed at her oven making Joe Froggers for the long journey ahead of them. It smelled extra good to Solamae, as though she hadn't been there in a long time. "Have you seen Pee Wee, Mrs. Big?" "Yes, he's up on deck, hiding under the lifeboats, playing a little game where he spies on people." That sounded just like Pee Wee, but Solamae had to wonder just how Mrs. Big could keep such a close eye on everyone while she was so busy with her baking. She was even better that Ustabe! *Maybe I should ask her*, Solamae thought to herself.

On the way to find Pee Wee, Solamae grabbed some Joe Froggers. And, it's a good thing she did, because Pee Wee had no intention of being home before dark that night. It crossed Solamae's mind that Pee Wee might have seen something that would explain the mystery. *I've got to stop thinking about the Polar Express*, she lectured herself. When they did catch up with Pee Wee, he was under a

lifeboat, just as Mrs. Big said. He was feverously taking notes on everything he saw happening on deck. "I saw you coming a long time ago. It's written in my notes." It wasn't clear exactly what he was up to, so Solamae asked him, "What are you going to do with those notes of yours?" Pee Wee confidently responded, "They could come in handy someday." It was like a prediction.

Solamae hoped it would be an easy journey; she had had quite enough excitement recently. "Let's go out on the point and see what the sea has to offer today." Pee Wee said no, he was too busy, but Puppy was always game. Besides, she could sense that Solamae had something on her mind. "Let's go!" Puppy yelped as she headed to their favorite place, the bowsprit of the ship. It was true, being out on the point with Puppy was just what Solamae needed to clear her head of the Polar Express. She accepted the fact that she may never know for sure, but she chose to believe.

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 subsequently took up the study of horticulture. Until 2000, Ms. Schneider operated a large Christmas tree farm and ornamental plant nursery specializing in choice and rare flowering trees. Following that, Ms. Schneider returned to Miami where she currently resides.

Ms. Schneider retired in June 2007. She is presently pursuing a doctoral degree at St. Thomas University. Among Ms. Schneider's accomplishments during her undergraduate studies at Barry University was her essay, "The Path to Silence: The Uses of Meditation," which tied for first place in the Sigma Tau Delta International English Honor Society Writing Contest and which was published in *What Oft Was Thought*. Additionally, Ms. Schneider was named Website Editor for Barry University's Newspaper, *The Buccaneer*, where she also served as a staff writer. She is a member of the Sigma Tau Delta International English Honor Society, Phi Beta Delta, Delta Epsilon Iota, and Alpha Chi Honor Societies.

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I would like to acknowledge each one of the children who collaborated as they wrote their original plays, *Killer Attack* and *The Apocalypse*, as well as their original songs, *King Sparkles, My Name is Mini*, and *I'm a Spy*. They subsequently performed their compositions at the Theatre Royal Bath Children's Theatre in Bath, England. I thank them for sharing their considerable imaginations and inspirations, for their hard work, and for the privilege of working alongside them. I will be eternally grateful to each of them for selflessly sharing their great talents.

Thank you: Daisy, Kit, Oliver, Karuna, Jemima, William, and all the extras. Thanks to you, Solamae and her companions will continue their adventures for many years to come.

We welcome contributions to *The Little Mouse Solamae* series.



Linda Cardinal Schneider



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 third volume in the series takes Solamae and her friends on a journey that ranges from the South Pole to the Caribbean Sea, and has a surprise ending in the Bermuda Triangle. This tale has ten exciting chapters (30-40) that were contributed by the year-four students at Corsham Primary School in the United Kingdom in 2016, under the direction of James Essam, Deputy Head Teacher at Corsham Primary School Pound Pill, Corsham, Wiltshire England.

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.

Night fell suddenly, it was eerie. The water became as calm as a sheet of glass. A dense cloud engulfed the ship and there was no moonlight. Solamae couldn't tell the sky from the sea. Nothing was moving, including the ship. The wind died, the sails went flat. Once again, they were at the mercy

of the sea. They would wait all night for the wind to come back, but it never did. As morning broke, the ship began to vibrate. Solamae, Puppy and the six little Bigs ran toward the bow of the ship to try to see what was happening. Just as they reached the bow, the ship spun around in a circle and a gentle wind lifted Solamae up and plopped her on the Polar Express!





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