

MOLLY AND THE FALCON

by Maggie Felsch

THE GOOD AND THE BEAUTIFUL CURRICULUM



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Cover design by Phillip Colhouer

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Chapter 1

UI and UE



A sudden gust of wind cruised down through the pine trees that covered the steep hillside. It circled around a little white home with blue shutters, and then it swirled the dark hair of a 14-year-old girl named Molly. She was standing in the backyard of her new home, admiring the pink and orange hues of the sunset.



Suddenly, there was a loud clattering, and Molly whirled around. The sound had come from the shed in the yard, but she didn't see anything. Then something thumped against the shed wall, and Molly was sure that she saw a flash of white go past the shed window. As fast as her legs could carry her, Molly flew into the house and slammed and locked the door. She lived with her father in the cozy little rental home. They had only been there for one week. This was the first time Dad had left Molly alone at home while he went into the tiny town for some groceries.

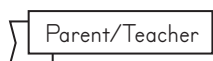
Breathing hard, Molly went to the dining room window and peeked through the curtains. The shed looked still and quiet.





She continued to watch and saw another sudden flash of white again through the shed window. After a moment, she heard her dad's truck rolling up the tree-lined avenue to her house.

"Phew!" said Molly aloud. She ran to the front door so quickly that she tripped over the rug and bruised her knee. She didn't even notice the pain because her mind was on what might be in the shed.



"Dad, there's something—or *someone*—in our shed!" Molly cried from the front porch.

"Stay in the house, Molly," he said seriously.

Through the window, Molly watched her dad walk around to the backyard and toward the shed. Another clattering made him pause a moment before continuing.

Carefully, he peered through the partially opened shed door. Molly realized she was holding her breath as her dad stood totally still, letting his eyes adjust to the dark shed.

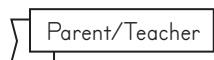
Then, he turned to the house with a smile on his face and motioned for Molly to come.

Molly let out her breath and wondered what he could possibly have found. She hurried out the back door toward him.



"It's a bird of prey," Dad said, "a hawk or a falcon, I think. But I really have no clue when it comes to bird species. We can peek inside, but stay behind me."

Molly didn't argue. As she took a step into the shed, she saw a few tools on a shelf and an old green wheelbarrow, but nothing else. Then Dad guided her eyes with his finger to a far corner. A large bird was standing still as a statue, watching them with huge yellow-ringed black eyes. It held one wing out oddly.



"It's hurt," Molly said. Her voice frightened the bird, and it tried to fly but only made it to a nearby shelf.

Dad shut the shed door. Molly noticed that it was already beginning to get dark out.

"What are we going to do?" Molly asked.

Dad rubbed his chin and thought. "Well, for tonight let's keep the shed door shut and do some research. Then, hopefully we can get it some help first thing tomorrow morning."

"Why are we keeping the door shut?" Molly asked.

"To keep the bird warmer and to protect it from any wild animals that might come into the shed at night."

Molly nodded in understanding.

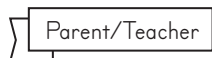




"We could feed it some juicy blueberries I picked up at the store today," Dad said. "Or do you think it would prefer grapes?"

"It's a bird of prey, Dad," Molly said with a grin. "They eat small animals, not fruit."

"Oh yes, I'm sure you're right. I didn't get any small animals at the store," Dad said with a laugh. "I didn't know we'd have a bird of prey to rescue."



Molly and her dad watched the bird through the shed window for at least another half hour. Molly especially was fascinated by the majestic animal, sitting up straight with its curved beak and its breast poking out. She studied it in the dim light until it got too dark to see anymore. Then she and her dad walked back to the house.

What would happen to the bird? Molly thought about this question as she gazed out her bedroom window at the star-filled sky for a long time before she fell asleep.

When she woke up in the morning, her first thought was of the injured bird in their shed. She hurried and got dressed and pulled on her shoes.

"Let's go see our bird of prey, Dad!" she called as she ran down the stairs.

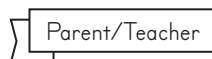
Chapter 4

EIGH



A group of eighteen people gathered in the large yard of the falconer, Mr. Sanchez, who stood at the front of the group with his son, Simon. A majestic bird of prey was perched on Simon's extended arm.

Molly couldn't peel her eyes away from the majestic bird while Mr. Sanchez described the art of falconry to the homeschool group.



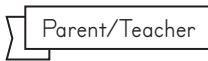
"Simon is holding a one-year-old red-tailed hawk that we call Zazzy," Mr. Sanchez explained. "God has blessed her with the natural ability and instinct to catch wild prey, such as squirrels, rabbits, and pigeons. As licensed falconers, Simon and I have trained her to hunt with us as a team. For example, we take her to the edge of a forest and release her. She flies high, scouting out prey animals. When she finds one, she dives down and catches it. In the wild, she would then eat it, but as part of our team, she brings it to us, and then we reward her with food."

A teenage boy raised his hand and asked, "How long did it take to train her to hunt with you?"





"Great question," Mr. Sanchez said. "It only takes two to three weeks to train her to hunt. Then, after one year of flying with us, we will release her back into the wild. We usually only keep each bird for one year, although some falconers, like one of our neighbors, prefer to fly the same bird year after year. Zazzy is our eighth bird. She weighs only two pounds, but don't let her weight fool you. She is a mighty hunter and can reach speeds of up to 120 miles per hour! How would you all like to watch Zazzy catch the lure?" he asked.



The group cheered! Simon put a whistle to his mouth and blew one short puff. Zazzy lifted her wings and flew from his arm. Then Simon bent down and picked up the end of a rope with a leather ball attached at the end and began swinging it round and round. Zazzy flew in circles above her admirers. Molly watched in awe as the red-tailed hawk beat her large wings, using her red tail feathers to steer her course. Suddenly, the beautiful hawk swooped down at Simon. With perfect timing, she reached her talons out and snatched something from the swinging leather ball. She landed gracefully on the ground next to Simon and ate whatever it was that she had grabbed from the ball.

"Good girl," Simon said. He knelt down, setting his gloved arm next to Zazzy. She stepped onto his glove, and he stood up again. Zazzy was incredible!



★★
Student

For the next hour, Mr. Sanchez and Simon taught the homeschool group all kinds of amazing facts about falconry and birds of prey in general. The more Molly heard, the more she wanted to know. She had never in her life felt so excited to learn. At the end of the presentation, she gathered her courage to go ask Simon some questions.

Parent/Teacher

Simon was just as eager to teach as Molly was to learn. They talked for another hour about falconry. Other kids, from young children up to teenagers, chatted with them too, asking questions and introducing themselves to Molly.

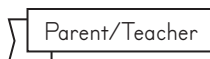
One girl named Aspen pleaded with Molly to come to their homeschool activities every Friday. "Next week we're meeting at the bike park!" Aspen told her.



By the time Molly and her dad left that afternoon, Molly had made many new friends. She was excited to meet with them at the bike park next Friday!

Simon had insisted that Molly borrow his favorite book about falcons and said she could bring it back to him when she finished reading it.

That night, as Molly's dad read on the couch, Molly sat curled up in a big chair by the fireplace under the comforting weight of a heavy quilt. By the light of a lamp and the glowing fire, she read all about falcons.



She was quite fascinated when she read about the history of falconry in Great Britain. For several thousand years, British falconers had used a variety of birds for hunting prey. The type of bird each individual used depended on the person's rank—peregrine falcons and gyrfalcons were for kings and earls, goshawks and sparrowhawks for the middle class, and kestrels for the servants.

She discovered that kestrels are amazing little birds of prey. The book explained that kestrels are able to hover in one place in the sky, like a helicopter, to watch for field mice, and then dive down and catch the little rodents.





Molly yawned. She realized she was getting very sleepy, so she closed the book. As she watched the flames dance slowly in the fireplace, she thought of the injured peregrine falcon she had found in the shed. She imagined him soaring above her out in a meadow, beating his wings at incredible heights. A sudden longing for adventures with the falcon filled her heart and mind.



The ringing of her dad's phone snapped her out of her thoughts.

"Excuse me, Molly," he said. "I need to take this call." He hurried from the living room to the kitchen to answer the phone.

"Wonderful! Yes, I can meet you there tomorrow," she heard him say. "This is very exciting. But I don't want Molly to know anything about this. Can we meet during my lunch break? Twelve o'clock sounds good. I'll see you then."

Molly greeted her dad when he came in. "Hi, Dad. What was that about?"

"Oh," he said, looking uncomfortable. "I didn't realize you could hear me. It's nothing you need to worry about. Now tell me, what was your favorite bird you saw today?"

Molly tried to answer his question, but she couldn't shake the mysterious phone conversation from her mind.

Chapter 11

GN, IGN, AUGH



"We should have been getting home about now," Tara said, looking glumly at her watch.

It was late in the afternoon and still raining hard.

"Our parents are going to wish they had never sent their daughters on a hike," Molly said with a fearful voice. "What are we going to do?"

"We're going to stick together like Mom and Dad taught us," Tilly said.



Tara gained courage from her twin. "That's right!" she said. "Sticking together is the first rule of survival. And the second one is to stay calm and to stay put. That's exactly what we'll do!"

Molly looked at her friends. "Do you think they'll be able to find us here if we stay put?"

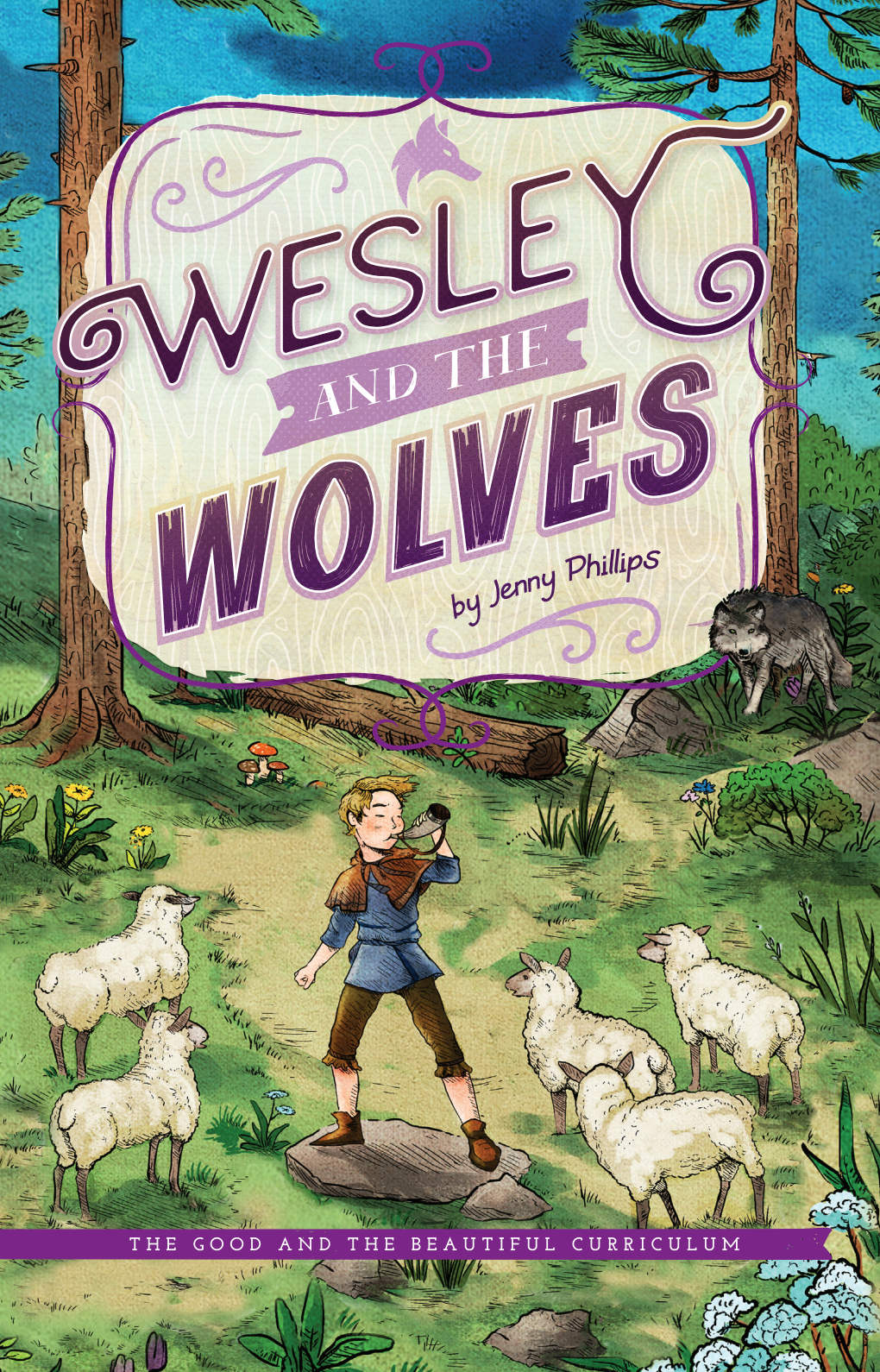
"We can sure hope and pray so," Tilly answered. "If we try to find our way out, we might just get more lost."



After another hour or so, the drizzling rain finally died down to a sprinkle and then stopped altogether. The first signs of evening crawled in. The clouds moved away, revealing a colorful sunset of amber gold, pink, and bright orange. It was all so lovely except for one thing—gnats! The tiny bugs appeared out of nowhere and started gnawing at the girls' faces and arms.

"Molly and Tilly," Tara said, waving gnats away from her face, "can I assign you two to gather wood for a fire? I'll try to get one started."

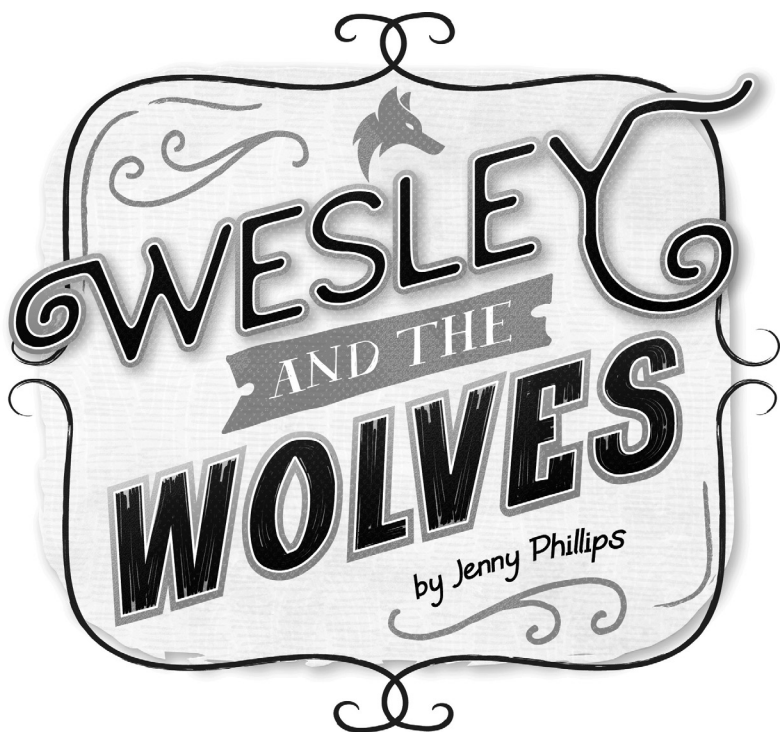




WESLEY AND THE WOLVES

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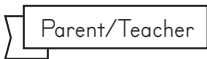
Chapter 1



The sun had just risen over the quiet valley, and rays of light danced around Wesley's home.

The squirrels darted quickly from tree to tree, and the birds chirped quite joyfully.

Wesley pulled off his quilt and jumped out of bed.



After saying prayers by his bedside, Wesley followed his usual morning routine. He quickly pulled on some shorts and ran outside, barefooted.

"Hello, sheep! Hello, squirrels! Hello, birds! Hello, sky!" he called as he dashed across the dew-covered carpet of grass.

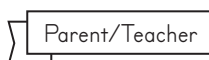
He then splashed into the gurgling stream for his daily morning dip. He sat down in his favorite spot where the water was the deepest. Refreshing coolness flowed around him, almost to his shoulders. He looked up and watched the pine trees waving back and forth gently in the breeze.

Ten minutes later, Wesley's mother called from the front door. "Wesley, time for breakfast!"



In the house lived Wesley, his little sister Alice, and their mother and father.

Wesley sat at the table and watched as his mother set a bowl of berries and cream, a quarter of a loaf of bread, a yellow square of butter, and a mug of sweet-smelling liquid in front of him.



“Wow,” exclaimed Wesley. “Thank you, Mother. This is the biggest breakfast I’ve ever had.”

“There’s a reason for that,” replied his mother with a sparkle in her eyes. “It’s a special day.”

“A special day?” Wesley wrinkled his forehead. “What do you mean?”

Wesley’s father cleared his throat. “Son, you are twelve years old now. We feel it is time for you to take on more responsibility.”

“Responsibility?” questioned Wesley. “What do you mean?”

“Well,” said his mother. “We think it is time for you to take our herd of sheep to the green pastures up in the mountains each day. You can start today after you milk the cow.”

Wesley was thrilled. He felt like a man as he gulped down his mother’s special fruit juice and chewed on the delicious bread. He had been waiting for this for so long.

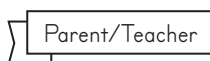




Wesley's cow, Queen, was calm and sweet-tempered. With big squirts, Wesley squeezed the white liquid into the pail until it was filled.

"Looks like about twelve quarts," Wesley said to Queen. "You give the best quality milk."

Wesley then scooped up some hay to feed to Queen and noticed a square of wood on the floor where he had taken the hay.



The square of wood was a slightly different color than the rest of the wooden floor, and the square seemed to be tilted just a little bit. Wesley got on his hands and knees and pushed on the wooden square. To his surprise, the square flipped down, revealing a little, dark hole. Wesley lit a lamp and set it beside the shallow hole.

"A key!" he exclaimed as he put his hand into the hole and grasped a heavy, golden key that looked old and worn.

Wesley's first thought was that he should tell his father about the key. He put it back in the hole and put the square of wood back. However, he forgot all about the key when he saw his father next.





Later that morning, Wesley herded the sheep together and started leading them up to the pasture.

Wesley's little sister Alice decided to walk with him partway. They were great friends and hardly ever quarreled, but Wesley could be quite a teaser sometimes.



As the siblings walked together beneath the wide blue sky, they talked about the beautiful pear orchard their family owned. The pears were still green, but were getting big.

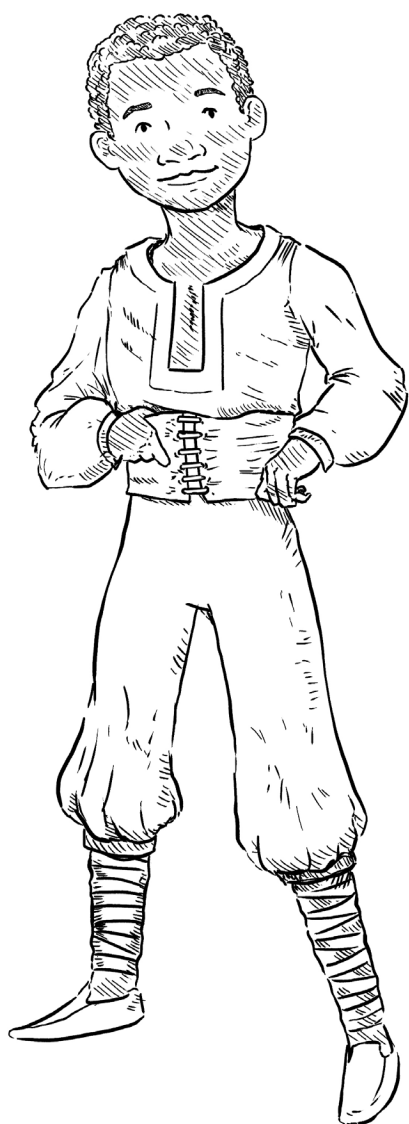
A quarter of the way up the trail, Wesley saw his friend, Arthur, who was his closest neighbor.

Arthur walked along the pathway with Wesley and the sheep.

"I have big news—HUGE news, HUMONGOUS news," Arthur proclaimed.

"What is it?" asked Wesley, giving all his attention to his friend.

"Well," began Arthur, "do you remember how we both want to learn how to read? Well, our village is going to have school at the town hall. They hired a school teacher, and school starts on Monday!"





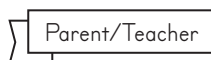
"School!" cried Alice. "Oh, that is the best news ever!"

"That's amazing!" cried Wesley. "I have dreamed of going to school."

Wesley stopped, and then he became quiet.

"What's wrong?" asked Arthur.

"I can't go to school," Wesley said quite sadly. "I have to take care of these sheep."



"Don't worry!" Arthur said in his usual cheerful voice. "Since most of the children in our village have to help their parents with the farms and animals and chores during the day, our teacher said he will start school mid-afternoon. You can make it in time if your parents let you bring the sheep home in the early afternoon."

"Oh, I'm sure they will!" exclaimed Wesley joyously. "They have always wanted a school here in the village for Alice and me. They never had the chance to learn to read, so they can't teach us about letters and words. Have you met the school teacher?"

"Yes, I have," replied Arthur proudly. "He's young. He told me that he has a special gift to give each student on the first day of class. I have no idea what it is."



For the rest of the day, Wesley dreamed about going to school in just a few days.

“What could the special gift be?” Wesley asked himself. “I can’t wait to find out.”

Chapter 3

Challenge

Words:

field

group

pears

several

OR Can Say /ER/

Student

On Monday, the world seemed wonderful to Wesley. He had finished his work with the sheep and was leaving for his first day of school. From over in a field, his father waved.

Parent/Teacher

Wesley waved back and then hurried down to the village, holding Alice's hand. Arthur joined them along the way.

"Do you think our teacher still has a gift for each of us?" Wesley asked his friend.

"Yes, I think so," replied Arthur. "I can't wait to find out."

"Look! A bald eagle!" Wesley suddenly cried, pointing to a grove of trees.

"Where?" asked Alice, who loved bald eagles. "I don't see it."

"Made you look," Wesley said with a laugh.

"That's not really funny," Alice said.

"Come on," Arthur urged. "Let's go faster. I don't want to be late for the first day."

They finally reached the village hall. It barely held the 22 excited students.

"Welcome!" said the school teacher when everyone had quieted down. "I'm Mr. Duncan."



Wesley looked around. A world map hung on one wall. Books of many colors lined a shelf on another wall.

"We are first going to divide the class into two groups," the teacher said, "a junior group and a senior group."



Wesley waited for the teacher to say something about a special gift he had for each student. He did not have to wait long. Mr. Duncan plunked a heavy box onto his desk.

"I have something special for each one of you," he began. "Place it on the edge of your desk, and I will explain why this gift is so valuable in a few weeks."

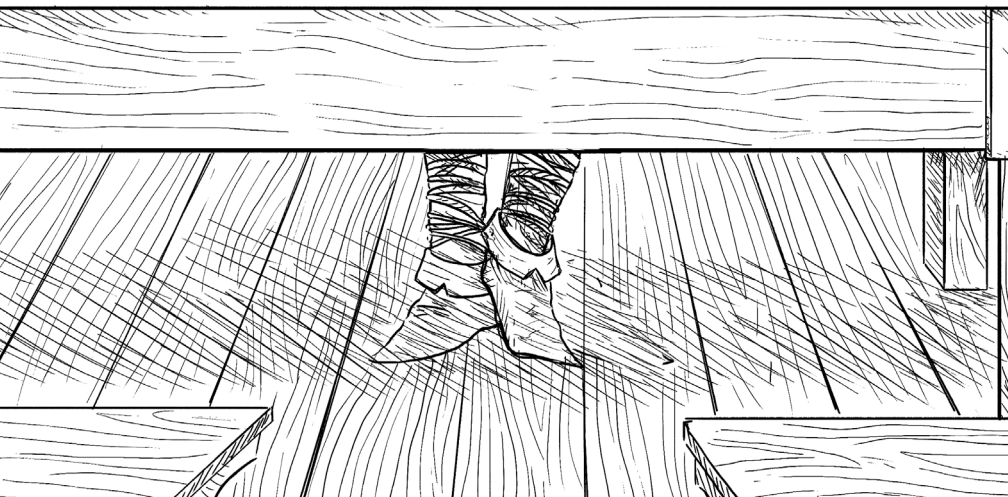
The room seemed to be holding its breath as the teacher opened the box. He pulled something out and put it on Alice's desk. It was a rock.

"A rock!" Wesley was confused. It looked like just a plain, ordinary, smooth gray rock.

"I could find those any day down by the river," Wesley thought. "Why does our teacher think these are so special?"

When the teacher set a rock on Wesley's desk, Wesley picked it up. Yep! It looked just like an ordinary rock. He felt all around it and even tapped it on his desk. He did not see anything special.

"Maybe there is something inside of it," Wesley wondered as the teacher began giving a lesson.





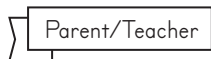
Wesley was excited as he left school. He had learned several letters that day, and his teacher said it would only be a few weeks until Wesley would be able to start reading words.

However, when he got home, his father looked worried.

"I have bad news," he said.

"Did our cow get loose?" Alice asked.

"It's worse than that," Father said.



He held up a pear from their pear orchard. It was covered in brown holes.

"Codling moths," Father said. "They have invaded the pears this year."

"Oh, no!" Wesley said. "What are we going to do?"

"Well, we have to pick all the fruits this year and burn them. Then somehow we have to get a bunch of chickens."

"Chickens?" cried Alice.

"Yes," said Father. "The pesky insects will stay in the ground over winter. The chickens will find them and eat them, so we won't have this problem next year. But that means we won't have any pears this year—if we can even get chickens. We don't have any money to buy them."





Wesley frowned. The pears were a major part of their farm. In fact, without the pears, his family would not have money for things like flour, sugar, cloth, and candles.

The family had some savings, so they would make it through this year, but they had to prevent the moths from coming back next year.

Wesley made a worthy goal. "Somehow, I will find a way to help buy those chickens!"

Chapter 8

Soft C and G

Student

After a breakfast of apple cider, cereal, and slices of ham with a spcy sauce, Wesley and his father took the golden key and set out to find the door in the mountain. Father had the golden key in his pocket. The dawn was spreading gentle pink and orange grays of light across the green hills.

“I’m certain I can show you the place,” Wesley declared to his father. “I really did see a door in the mountain.”

Parent/Teacher

It felt wonderful to Wesley to be out in the cool morning with his father. Wesley felt sure that the door in the mountain contained the chest of gold.

“We can buy the chickens we need to save the pear orchard!” Wesley thought.

When they came to the river above the pasture where Wesley watched the sheep, his heart beat with excitement. They were almost there.

