

Dad always says that red is a great color in a photograph, so I thought for sure I'd take a picture of our new house. But this washed-out red seemed to disappear into the woods behind it. The gambrel roof and two long windows above the porch made it look like an old barn with white-rimmed, tired eyes watching the lake.

This house didn't look like it was supposed to be quirky, though. It looked like whoever built it didn't really know how.

So I turned to see what the house was looking at: the bright blue lake, puckered by darker waves, and the four mountains — three graceful curves and one sharp peak — rising above the pine trees across the water.

When we lived in Vermont three years ago, there were mountains, too, but this would be my first time living on a lake. "Let's go down to the beach," I said, but Ansel pulled backward on his leash. "It's okay. You don't have to go swimming. We'll just look at the water."

Ansel's only fifteen pounds, but those fifteen can feel like a hundred when I'm tugging him to come and he's pulling back: *No way*.

I had to carry him. Between the lawn and the lake were thousands of smooth, soft-colored rocks: white,

gray, rust, yellow, and tan. They crunched under my feet, sounding like marbles rubbing together or Scrabble pieces as you mix them up. *Flip-flops are the wrong shoes for this*, I thought as my foot slid to the side.

Ansel's nose twitched at the unfamiliar lake smell: weedy and a tiny bit fishy. Out in the middle, the water was sparkling-pretty, like someone had spilled a whole bottle of glitter out there. But up close, an icky border of bright yellow pollen floated along the lake's edge. Beyond the pollen, a school of tiny minnows swam along, shifting directions quickly. *This way! No, that way! Who's in charge here?*

When I set Ansel on the sand, he immediately leaned down to sniff a little brown moth that was stuck in the pollen, fluttering. The moth might already be too wet, too exhausted to live. But I found a leaf to scoop him out of the water and placed him gently on a rock so he could dry his wings.

Even half a chance beats none.

Holding my camera to my eye, I saw I had ruined my shot. Now the colors were too close: drab brown moth on drab brown rock. And there was no story. It was just a moth stuck to a rock.

Dad would've thought of the photo first. He would've shot the moth struggling in the pollen and found a way to make people care — even though it

was just a plain, ordinary, dying bug. Dad's an amazing photographer, and he says it's just as important to show the hard things in the world as it is to show the beautiful ones. Even in the midst of horrible things, there are little bits of wonder, and all of it's true.

Ansel barked. Switching off my camera, I glanced where his nose pointed. On the beach next door was a row of kayaks, and an older lady was standing on the dock. Sitting next to her were a boy and a girl, both about my age, with their feet in the water and towels draped around their shoulders. Smaller kids were swimming nearby, just their heads showing above the waves. "Grandma Lilah, watch me!" a small voice yelled. "I'm a water bug!"

Ansel barked again. "Hush," I told him. "Don't bark at our neighbors. They live here."

The gray-shingled cottage next door looked how I had imagined a cottage on the lake would look: a fairy-tale house with bright-white painted lattice crisscrossing the tops of the bow windows and dormers jutting out from the roof. Baskets of red petunias hung on the long front porch.

Beside it, our cottage looked like a run-down summer camp on move-in day, with random boxes and suitcases and stuff in the yard.

Watching the neighbors having fun together at their pretty house made me feel lonely, not just alone. At twelve years old, I'd already moved three times in my life. I should've been able to march over there and say: "Hi, I'm Lucy. We just moved in," and not be scared. Practice only made it familiar, though. Never easy.

Ansel barked again, and the boy on the dock looked over at us.

*Uh-oh!* I lifted my hand and swished it by my ear, so it could go either way: waving if he was friendly or brushing away a mosquito if he wasn't.

The boy waved back, got to his feet, and started walking down his dock toward the beach.

*Is he coming over here?* I took a deep breath. Dad had driven us past my new school, and it was so small that any new girl would stick out immediately in September. It would really help if I made some friends over the summer.

I gave the boy my warmest smile. "I'm Lucy, and this is Ansel. We just moved in."

"I'm Nate." As he reached out his hand to Ansel, I gripped the leash. Ansel doesn't love everybody.

"We're sooo glad to meet you!" I said, in my sweetest, most singsongy voice, so Ansel would hear the "happy" in my voice and feel okay about the hand

coming toward him. He took a glancing sniff of Nate's fingers. His ears, which usually stuck up, stayed back, but the tip of his tail wagged.

Nate smiled, the freckles rising across his nose. There was a slight gap between his front teeth, which made his face interesting and a little funny and quirky — a *good* quirky. I couldn't believe how comfortable Nate seemed only wearing shorts and a towel. I'd be cringing if I had to meet someone in my bathing suit.

"We noticed the FOR SALE sign was gone," Nate said. "We were wondering who would be moving in."

"It's us," I said, and immediately wished I'd said something smarter. Of course it was us! "Though my dad leaves tomorrow on a trip to Arizona for his work, so it'll be mostly me and my mom this summer."

Ansel barked again, and I noticed the girl from the dock was coming up the beach, too. She wore glasses, and her long hair hung in wet pigtails.

"Lucy, this is Megan," Nate said. "Her cottage is the yellow one down at the point."

"Hi." I gave her a bright smile.

Megan tipped her head a little sideways, looking at me over her glasses. "How long are you here for?" she asked.