

## SPRING BREAK

It is the last day of Spring Break. My house is shrinking and I feel like Alice in Wonderland. Afraid that my head might burst through the roof, I head for the mall. I have ten bucks in my pocket—what to spend it on? French fries—ten dollars' worth of french fries, ultimate fantasy. If *Alice in Wonderland* were written today, I bet she'd have a supersized order of fries that said "Eat me," instead of a small cake. On the other hand, we're rushing toward summer, which means shorts and T-shirts and maybe even a bathing suit now and then. I walk past the deep-fat fryers.

Now that spring is past, the fall fashions are in the store windows. I keep waiting for the year when the fashions catch up to the seasons. A couple of stores have performance artists hanging at the front door. One guy keeps flying a stupid loop-the-loop airplane; a plastic-faced woman keeps tying and re-tying a shawl. No, now it's a skirt. Now it's a halter top. Now it's a head scarf. People avoid looking at her, as if they aren't sure if they should applaud or tip her. I feel bad for her—I wonder what her grades were in high school. I want to give her a tip, only it would be rude to ask if she has change for a ten.

I ride the escalator down to the central fountain, where today's entertainment is face-painting. The line is long and loud—six-year-olds and their mothers. A little girl walks past

me—she's a tiger. She's crying about ice cream and she wipes her tears. Her tiger paint smears and her mom yells at her.

"What a zoo."

I turn. Ivy is sitting on the edge of the fountain, a giant sketchbook balanced on her knees. She nods toward the line of whiners and the face painters furiously coloring stripes, spots, and whiskers.

"I feel bad for them," I say. "What are you drawing?"

Ivy moves so I can sit next to her and hands me the sketchbook. She's drawing the kids' faces. Half of each face is plain and sad, the other half is plastered with thick clown makeup that is fake-happy. She hasn't painted any tigers or leopards.

"The last time I was here, they were doing clown faces. No such luck today," Ivy explains.

"Looks good, though," I say. "It's kind of spooky. Not creepy, but unexpected." I hand back the sketchbook.

Ivy pokes her pencil into her bun. "Good. That's what I'm trying for. That turkey-bone thing you did was creepy, too. Creepy in a good way, good creepy. It's been months and I'm still thinking about it."

What am I supposed to say now? I bite my lip, then release it. I pull a roll of Life Savers from my pocket. "Want a piece?" She takes one, I take three, and we suck in silence for a moment.

"How's the tree coming?" she asks.

I groan. "Stinks. It was a mistake to sign up for art. I just couldn't see myself taking wood shop."

"You're better than you think you are," Ivy says. She opens to an empty page in the sketchbook. "I don't know why you keep using a linoleum block. If I were you, I'd just let it out, draw. Here—try a tree."

We sit there trading pencils. I draw a trunk, Ivy adds a branch, I extend the branch, but it is too long and spindly. I start to erase it, but Ivy stops me. "It's fine the way it is, it just needs some leaves. Layer the leaves and make them slightly different sizes and it will look great. You have a great start there."

She's right.