

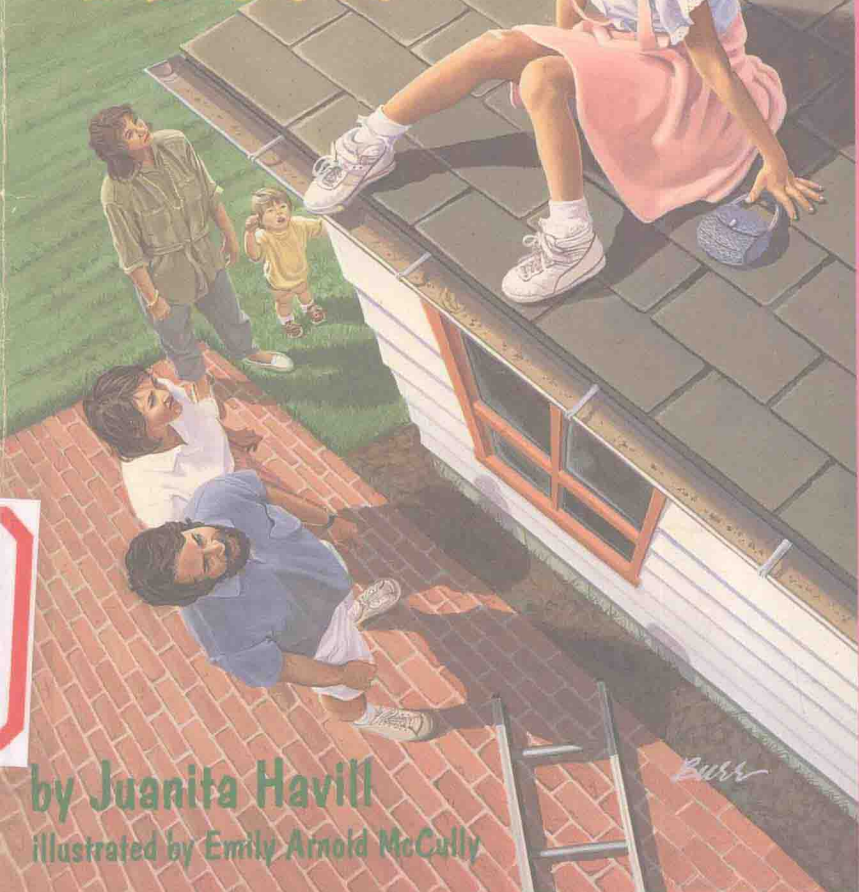
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A Bullseye Book 

Whenever there's trouble...

It always happens to

**LEONA**



by **Juanita Havill**

illustrated by **Emily Arnold McCully**

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to  
LEONA**

**by Juanita Havill**

**illustrated by  
Emily Arnold McCully**

**BULLSEYE BOOKS**

**ALFRED A. KNOPF • NEW YORK**

*For the Flanagins,  
especially Joan*

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# *Lonely Leona*

Leona felt like running away for the first time when Victoria went to first grade but Leona couldn't. Then Victoria began to take piano lessons, but Leona was too young. It was worse after Albert was born. Her parents didn't have enough time for two children. Why did they want to have three? And why should she be the one left out?

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*"Leona, watch what you're doing!"*

THE FIRST THING LEONA DID WHEN SHE WOKE UP was to reach for her lavender straw purse. She opened the purse to make sure everything was there. In it were things she would take with her if she ran away: Band-Aids, toothbrush, a glass monkey, baseball cards of the entire Chicago White Sox team, and a piece of her old blanket that Mom had made her throw away when she finally started school. She had snatched the monkey from Victoria's collection. But Victoria had never noticed. She didn't play with her glass animals anymore.

Leona felt like running away for the first time when Victoria went to first grade but Leona couldn't. Then Victoria began to take piano lessons, but Leona was too young. It was worse after Albert was born. Her parents didn't have enough time for two children. Why did they want to have three? And why should she be the one left out?

Leona climbed down the bunk bed ladder with her purse and set it on her desk. Then, rubbing sleep from her eyes, she went downstairs. She heard Daddy's printer making a racket. Then the printer stopped. She heard the tapping of his fingers on the computer

keyboard. His office door was closed. Better not bother him.

She stopped at the kitchen doorway. Mom was leaning over, beside Albert's high chair, picking up Cheerios Albert had thrown on the floor. Mom didn't scold him. She never scolded Albert. He could throw the whole carton of milk on the floor and she wouldn't say a word.

"We have a busy day today," Mom said. "I'm going to need your cooperation."

Victoria looked up from the book about African elephants that she was reading while she munched toast. She was wearing her new glasses.

Leona squinted her eyes into tiny slits. She stuck her arms out in front of her and stumbled toward the table.

"Mom, I can't see. I need glasses." Leona bumped the table hard and Albert's orange juice spilled.

"Leona, for heaven's sake. Watch what you're doing," Mom said.

"But I can't see."

"Open your eyes a little. That might help." Mom mopped up the orange juice.

"Leona's just jealous. She wants glasses because I have them," said Victoria.

"No, I don't," said Leona. "I really can't see."

"Leona, the eye doctor said that you have twenty-twenty vision," Mom said. "He told me that you have the eyes of an eagle."





"I do?" said Leona. "I have the eyes of an eagle?" She stuck her tongue out at Victoria. But she couldn't help admiring the round lavender plastic frames that Victoria wore. Victoria looked so important in those glasses. Much more important than anyone who was twelve years old should look.

"Have some cereal, Leona." Mom set the box of cereal in front of Leona.

"I don't like that kind." Leona went to the cupboard to get her favorite cereal, Wrinkle Flakes. No one else in the family would touch them.

"I was telling Victoria and Albert that we have a busy day today," said Mom. "In fact, we have a busy week."

Mom looked around the kitchen, frowning. "I don't know where to start. It's not every day we have a reunion. Your Aunt Gwendolyn, my sister, is coming today. She is taking a whole week off just to visit us and see Uncle Rosco, our little brother. He's coming on Wednesday. He's on his way to drive in a motorcycle race."

"Yippee!" Leona yelled, her mouth full of Wrinkle Flakes. "We're going to a motorcycle race."

"No, Leona. Uncle Rosco is going to a motorcycle race. It's in Tulsa or somewhere. Too far for us to go. He's stopping by on the way."

Leona scooped up a soggy Wrinkle Flake with her spoon. "But I want to go to a motorcycle race, too," she said.

"Maybe we can go sometime," Mom said,

"when Uncle Rosco has a race that's closer. Girls, do you remember your aunt and uncle? It's been a long time."

"I remember Aunt Gwendolyn," Victoria said. "She's color coordinated."

"She does dress with style," Mom said. She brushed crumbs off her baggy green sweatshirt with a frown.

"Do I 'member?" Albert asked.

"You were a baby," Leona said. "Babies don't remember."

"I don't know, Albert," said Mom. "You were very little the last time Aunt Gwendolyn and Uncle Rosco came. You were just born."

"I remember Uncle Rosco," said Leona. "He is short and strong. He has curly blond hair and blue eyes, just like me."

"All wrong," said Victoria. "He is tall and skinny and has brown hair and brown eyes like me and Albert. Besides, you were a baby, Leona, and babies can't remember."

"No, I wasn't a baby," said Leona. "I was five years old."

"Don't argue, girls," said Mom. "I need your help. Clean up here when you're finished. After you've dressed, straighten up that room of yours. Swimming lessons this morning and Victoria has to practice piano."

"My side of the room is not messy," said Victoria. "Rita asked me to come over to see her new

ten-speed. I'll be back soon. I'll practice after swimming lessons."

Victoria rinsed her bowl, put it in the dishwasher, and ran upstairs to get dressed.

"Me, too," said Leona. "I want to see Rita's bike." She tipped her bowl to her lips and gulped down the last of the Wrinkles and milk. She rushed to set her bowl in the dishwasher. Then she ran up the stairs, tripping twice on her nightgown.

"Leona, your room. Straighten your room first."

"I will, Mom."

It's not fair, Leona thought. Victoria just shoves her things under the bed because she sleeps on the bottom bunk, but I don't have any place to hide my things.

While Victoria put her jeans on, Leona tossed her magnet set, books, crayons, fairy doll, skunk puppet, and clothes onto the top bunk. Then she climbed up and began examining the articles.

"My favorite skirt," she said. "I found my skirt."

"Big deal," said Victoria.

Leona smoothed the wrinkles of her purple-and-green flowered skirt. Perfect to wear to meet Aunt Gwendolyn. Leona dropped the skirt to the floor. She shoved everything else under the covers to the end. There was a big bump like someone sleeping crosswise at the foot of the bed. Leona set her stuffed animals on top of the bump. Then she climbed down and put on her skirt and a ruffled pink blouse.

"I'm ready, Victoria," she shouted, slipping her sandals on.

But Victoria had already gone.

"Wait for me! Wait for me!" Leona shouted. She didn't intend to miss a chance to sit on a ten-speed, even if she hadn't been invited.

## 2

### *The Ten-Speed*

"LET ME TRY. I WANT TO TRY." LEONA REACHED FOR the handlebars of Rita McIntosh's brand-new ten-speed bicycle.

Rita pushed her bike away from Leona's grasp. "Tell your sister she's too little, Victoria," Rita said.

"You heard Rita," said Victoria. Victoria gripped the handlebars and stepped over the sloping bar. She turned the pedal until it reached the top.

Leona watched Victoria stand up and begin to pedal. Victoria rode the bike along the edge of the street to their driveway half a block away.

Mom was piling beach towels in the back of the station wagon. She stopped and looked when Victoria came along. Albert rushed out of the garage and aimed a stick at Victoria.

"Look, Mom! I can ride Rita's ten-speed!" Victoria yelled.

Leona couldn't hear Mom exactly, but she had a good idea of what she was saying. Something like, "Wonderful. That's great, Victoria." And the next thing she would do would be to go buy Victoria a ten-speed because that's the way it always was. Victoria got everything first: tricycles, bicycles, roller skates, and new clothes. Leona only got hand-

me-downs and leftovers that were usually worn out. Then, because Albert was a boy and the "baby," he got everything new—just like Victoria all over again.

Victoria made two more loops in the driveway, then whizzed back to Rita and Leona.

"Mom wants you home now," Victoria said. "Time for swimming lessons. As soon as Aunt Gwendolyn comes, we are leaving."

Victoria stopped the bike. She threw her leg over the bar and stepped to the side with one hand on a handle grip. "A great bike, Rita."

Leona moved in a flash. She grabbed the free handle grip and shoved the bike forward out of Victoria's hand. Before Rita or Victoria could stop her, she stepped on the pedal. She felt the other pedal move around to her foot. Standing, leaning forward, and pedaling hard, she took off down the street.

"Leona, stop right now," Rita ordered.

"Stop, Leona," Victoria shouted and started after Leona.

Leona paid no attention. She felt the wind blow in her face and whistle in her ears. She could feel the bicycle pick up speed as if it had a motor of its own. She couldn't sit on the seat because then her feet wouldn't reach the pedals. Still standing, she gripped the handlebars to keep them steady. She rode over a crack in the sidewalk and wobbled. When she came to the driveway, she had to pedal harder to get over the bump at the bottom.

"Look, Mom. I can ride Rita's ten-speed." Leona

didn't look at Mom because she had to concentrate on the driveway.

"Leona, you're too little for that bike. Be careful," Mom shouted.

"Watch out, Albert," Leona screamed.

Albert jumped in front of Leona. He raised his stick and squinted his eyes. "Pow. Pow. I got you, Leona."

Leona just missed him and the handlebars jerked from side to side. She headed down the driveway and coasted for a moment, picking up speed. Then she squeezed the left-hand brake. Suddenly, Leona and the bike tumbled, right at the edge of the curb.

Leona's right knee throbbed. She looked at it as little beads of blood welled up in a red blotch. Through the handlebars she could see Rita and Victoria running toward her.

"That was dumb," said Victoria.

"Stay off my bike," said Rita. She separated the bike from Leona and righted it. Immediately, she found a bent spoke, and the handlebars were crooked, too.

"Good grief. My bike is brand new," said Rita. "I can't believe you did this to me."

"I'm sorry Rita," Leona said. "Albert got in the way. I can ride it. Did you see me?"

Rita and Victoria stared at Leona in cold silence.

"Come over when you can," Rita said to Victoria. "But please leave her at home. I don't want her



to destroy anything else.” Rita wheeled her bike up the sidewalk toward her house.

Leona got up slowly and limped after Victoria. Through her tear-bleary eyes she saw Aunt Gwendolyn get out of a car parked in front of their house. Leona hobbled faster.

Aunt Gwendolyn looked like a woman in the Sears catalog. She was wearing a pink blouse and straight gray skirt. She leaned over and gave Victoria a kiss on the head.

“Charming girl,” Aunt Gwendolyn said. “And here’s your boy. He was just a baby last time. You’ve grown so tall, Albert,” she noted.

Albert raised his stick.

“Don’t shoot Aunt Gwendolyn,” Leona shouted as she limped toward them.

“Oh my,” said Aunt Gwendolyn, looking startled. “You must be Leona.” Aunt Gwendolyn patted Leona on the head. Her fingernails were slick and shiny and dark pink.

“I’m the accident-prone one,” said Leona, with a sigh.

“Oh,” said Aunt Gwendolyn. “I hope not. Mavis, she looks a lot like you.”

“Do you think so?” said Mom.

Just then Leona didn’t care who she looked like. “I need a Band-Aid on my knee,” she said.

Mom examined Leona’s knee and frowned. “Leona, you have to promise to stay off bikes that are