



The Goldflower Adventures:

Tauren Forest

by Chiffon Strickland Jenkins
illustrated by MikeMotz.com



1

Sunny Days

It has to be a hundred and twenty degrees today, Olivia thought to herself as she sat on a huge blanket with her ankles crossed and her back against the weeping willow tree in her backyard. It was mid-day, and she had just finished her Saturday chores. You know, the usual duties: cleaning her room, putting away her freshly ironed shorts and tops,

and making sure her dog Speedy's food and water bowls were filled. Speedy was a great dog; Olivia got him as a surprise gift for her ninth birthday a few weeks ago. He was a small, white dog with exactly 31 black spots; Olivia had counted them herself. Marvin told her at her party he would get a new spot each week. So, of course Olivia would count them each week, and it always came out to 31. Maybe one day she would learn not to believe everything Marvin said.

She didn't call him Speedy because he was fast; in fact, it was the complete opposite. Speedy was relatively slow for a puppy. He trotted along at his own pace, always looking around and stopping to sniff and lick anything and everything. He was a curious dog, and Olivia loved that about him. She'd call out to him, "Hurry up, Speedy. We don't have all day," as he looked at her from across the room. For once, there was someone or something

that was slower than her. She often laughed as she remembered that she had been the slowest one in the house. Now, her Mom had to call out to both of them when they were running late.

As an only child, it was nice to have a companion—someone to talk to, bounce ideas off of, and share a room with. Speedy slept at the foot of Olivia's bed. Even now, he was sound asleep near her feet on the blanket.

There was a slight breeze that made the long limbs on the weeping willow tree dance from side to side. Each limb swayed as if it was moving to the sound of its own beat—not fast, not slow, but just right. If you looked at the movement for too long, it seemed to put you in a trance. After a few seconds, she shook off the trance-like distraction of the limbs and got back to the business at hand.

The cool shade was welcoming as she read the book by one of her favorite authors. The book was called *Tauren Forest*. She didn't read much, but when she did, it was usually a book about mystery and adventure. Her dad loved mysteries, and Olivia loved what he loved. He always encouraged her to explore and learn about other cultures. Faraway lands were the perfect setting for these kinds of books; the suspense and intrigue, along with the unknown terrain, made it the ultimate backdrop for something to happen. *Only strange creatures live in places like that*, Olivia thought. All the shows she watched with her dad proved this point as far as she was concerned.

Sometimes, she thought about becoming an author, but then talked herself out of it when she realized how long it probably took to write a book. *How in the world could someone spend hours, days, or even months writing and rewriting?*



She and her dad would spend hours on Friday nights watching movie after movie. After a marathon movie night, she would often have dreams of the movies, but the scenes seemed to run together. It was as if all the movies turned into one long film. Perhaps that's why she was a little sleepy this morning.

She looked down at her goldflower watch to check the time. It was one o'clock. It seemed as though she had been reading for hours. Olivia never had a good sense of time. Hours seemed like minutes and minutes like hours to her. She was only on chapter two, and although there was much more to discover in the story, she was curious to see what happened to the younger brother. A part of her wanted to skip to the last chapter, but she knew that wasn't the right thing to do.

She flipped through the pages, making a point to visualize what was happening. From time

to time, she would stop and take a sip of the lemonade her mom had made. On a hot day like today, it was definitely a refreshing treat. The lemonade also brought back fond memories of being at Gran's house. Her mom's lemonade was good, but not as good as Gran's. She often thought about how fearful she was before she found her adventurous spirit. Now, she had nerves of steel and could probably fight off a lion if the occasion called for it.

Speaking of lions, she remembered her best friend Josie had a softball game today. Their team was called the Lions Farm Braves. The game was at three, and Olivia and Ming-Lin were planning to ride their bikes over to the ballpark. Josie wasn't able to pitch in the last game because she was on punishment for coming home past her curfew a few weeks ago when they were out looking for leaves for a school project.

Josie had been moping around for the past several days; all she kept saying was how much her team needed her. Josie could be a little hard on herself and others when things weren't going her way. By now, Olivia knew to simply give Josie her space, and in time, she would get over the disappointment. And like clockwork in a few days, she was back to her normal self, making jokes, in a way that only Josie could. She could be a little brash at times, but her heart was always in the right place.

Olivia's parents were upset about her coming home late, too, but her punishment was not as bad as Josie's. She only had to hand wash dishes every day for a week. As for Ming-Lin, she couldn't ride her new bike or work on her fashion designs. But thankfully, they were all off of punishment now and were excited about the game today.

Distracted again by her thoughts, Olivia forced herself to focus back on the book. Speedy

must have been dreaming because he would make a low growling sound, open one eye, wiggle his tail, and then nod back off to sleep. She checked her watch once more, realizing she still had almost an hour before Ming-Lin would come racing around the corner to get her for the game. She took another sip of lemonade, let out a long, deep breath, stretched, rubbed her eyes, and then continued leisurely to the next page.