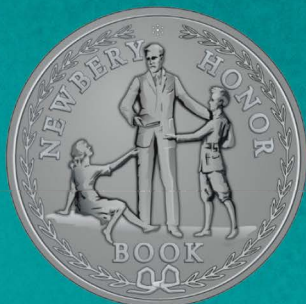
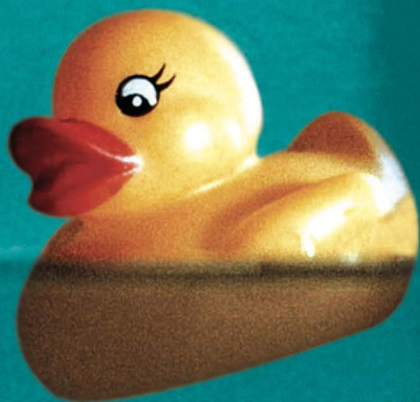




GOLD

RULES



CYNTHIA LORD

 SCHOLASTIC

Follow the rules.

“Come on, David.” I let go of his sleeve, afraid I’ll rip it. When he was little, I could pull my brother behind me if he didn’t want to do something, but now David’s eight and too strong to be pulled.

Opening the front door, I sigh. My first day of summer vacation is nothing like I dreamed. I had imagined today warm, with seagulls winging across a blue sky, not overcast and damp. Still, I refuse to grab my jacket from the peg inside the front door.

“Umbrella?” David asks, a far-off stare in his brown eyes.

“It’s not raining. Come on. Mom said go to the car.”

David doesn’t move.

I get his favorite red umbrella.

“Okay, let’s go.” I step onto the front porch and slide the umbrella into my backpack with my sketchbook and colored pencils.

“Let’s go to the video store,” David says, not moving one inch.

“You’re going to the clinic. But if you do a good job, Dad’ll take you to the video store when he comes home.”

The video store is David’s favorite place, better than the circus, the fair, or even the beach. Dad always invites me to come, too, but I say, “No, thanks.” David has to watch all the previews on the store TVs and walk down each row of videos, flipping boxes over to read the parental advisory and the rating — even on videos Dad would never let him rent. David’ll say, loud enough for the whole store to hear, “Rated PG-thirteen for language and some violence! Crude humor!” He’ll keep reaching for boxes and flipping them over, not even *seeing* the looks people give us. But the hardest part is when David kneels in the aisle to see the back of a video box a complete stranger is holding in his hand.

Dad says, “No one cares, Catherine. Don’t be so sensitive,” but he’s wrong. People *do* care.

Beside me, David checks his watch. “I’ll pick you up at five o’clock.”

“Well, *maybe* five o’clock,” I say. “Sometimes Dad’s late.”

David shrieks, “Five o’clock!”

“Shh!” I scan the yards around us to see if anyone heard, and my stomach flips. A moving van is parked in front of the house next door, back wide open, half full of chairs and boxes. From inside the truck, two men appear, carrying a couch between them.

My hands tremble, trying to zip my backpack. “Come on, David. Mom said go to the car.”

David stands with his sneaker toes on the top step, like it’s a diving board and he’s choosing whether to jump. “Five o’clock,” he says.

The right answer would be “maybe,” but David only wants surefire answers: “yes” and “no” and “Wednesday at two o’clock,” but never “maybe” or “it depends” or worst of all, “I don’t know.”

Next door the movers set the couch on the driveway.

If I hurry, I can ask them before they head into the house.

“Okay,” I say. “Dad will pick you up at five o’clock. That’s the rule.”

David leaps down the steps just as the moving men climb into the van. He might not understand some things, but David loves rules.

I know I’m setting up a problem for later because Dad’s always late, but I have rules, too, and one of mine is:

Sometimes you’ve gotta work with what you’ve got.

I take David’s elbow to hurry him. “Let’s go past the fence and talk to those men.”

A little spring mud remains under the pine trees near the fence. Only a month ago, puddles were everywhere when Mrs. Bowman called me over to say her house had been sold to a woman with a twelve-year-old daughter. “I knew you’d be pleased,” she said. “I told the realtor I have a girl just that age living next door and maybe they can be friends.”

A few weeks later, I had stood on my porch, waving, as Mrs. Bowman's son drove her away to her new apartment attached to his house.

It feels wrong that Mrs. Bowman's not living in the gray-shingled house next door anymore, and her porch looks empty without her rocking chairs. But I'm tingly with hopes, too. I've always wanted a friend in my neighborhood, and a next-door friend would be best of all.

Usually in summer I do lots of things by myself because my best friend, Melissa, spends the whole vacation in California with her dad. This year'll be different, though. The girl next door and I can do all my favorite summer things together: swimming at the pond, watching TV, and riding bikes. We could even send midnight messages from our windows, using flashlights and Morse code, like next-door friends do in books.

And the best part, David won't have to come since Mom won't have to drive me and pick me up.

I bite my teeth together, fighting the memory of my last sleepover at Melissa's. When Mom came to pick

me up, David raced around Melissa's kitchen, opening doors, looking for their cellar, even when Mom kept telling him this was a trailer and trailers don't have cellars.

"Real friends understand," Mom had said on the ride home. But here's what I understand: Sometimes everyone gets invited except us, and it's because of David.

Walking toward the van, I study the moving men. One has a blotchy face and looks all business. The younger one wears a half smile and a dirty T-shirt and jeans.

T-shirt Man seems friendlier.

"Remember the rule," I whisper, my hand pushing David's back to hurry him. "If someone says 'hi,' you say 'hi' back."

Down the walkway, I run through conversation possibilities in my head, but that one rule should be enough. There's only one question I need to ask, then I can take David right to the car.

"Hi!" I call, reaching the corner of the fence. David flickers his fingers up and down, like he's playing a piano in the air.

T-shirt Man turns around.

“Do you know when the family’s coming?” I ask.
“Is it today?”

He looks to the other man in the van. “When are the Petersons coming?”

“If someone says ‘hi,’ you say ‘hi’ back!” David yells. “That’s the rule!”

Both men stare past me with that familiar look. The wrinkled-forehead look that means, “What’s wrong with this kid?”

I grab David’s hands to stop his fingers.

“They’re coming about five o’clock,” the red-faced man says. “That’s what she said.”

“Five o’clock!” David twists under my arm.

My wrist kills from being curled backward. I grip my toes in my sneakers to hide the pain. “Thanks!” I pretend I can see my watch. “Wow, look at the time! Sorry, gotta go!”

Chasing David to the car, I hear heavy footsteps on the van’s metal ramp behind me, *thunk-thunk*.

David covers his ears with his hands. “It’s five o’clock. Let’s go to the video store!”

My own hands squeeze to fists. Sometimes I wish someone would invent a pill so David'd wake up one morning without autism, like someone waking from a long coma, and he'd say, "Jeez, Catherine, where have I been?" And he'd be a regular brother like Melissa has — a brother who'd give back as much as he took, who I could joke with, even fight with. Someone I could yell at and he'd yell back, and we'd keep going and going until we'd both yelled ourselves out.

But there's no pill, and our quarrels fray instead of knot, always ending in him crying and me sorry for hurting him over something he can't help.

"Here's another rule." I open the car door. "If you want to get away from someone, you can check your watch and say, 'Sorry, gotta go.' It doesn't always work, but sometimes it does."

"Sorry, gotta go?" David asks, climbing into the car.

"That's right. I'll add it to your rules."

The men carry a mattress, still in plastic, up the walkway next door. Someday soon I'm going to take a plate of cookies up those steps and ring the doorbell.

And if the girl next door doesn't have a flashlight, I'll buy her one that turns on and off easily.

Mom says I have to deal with what is and not to get my hopes up, but how else can hopes go but up?

"Wear your seat belt in the car," David states. "That's the rule."

"You're right." I click the seat belt across me and open my sketchbook to the back pages. That's where I keep all the rules I'm teaching David so if my some-day-he'll-wake-up-a-regular-brother wish doesn't ever come true, at least he'll know how the world works, and I won't have to keep explaining things.

Some of the rules in my collection are easy and always:

Say "excuse me" after you burp.

Don't stand in front of the TV when other people are watching it.

Flush!

But more are complicated, sometimes rules:

You can yell on a playground, but not during dinner.

A boy can take off his shirt to swim, but not his shorts.

It's fine to hug Mom, but not the clerk at the video store.

And a few are more hints than rules — but matter just as much:

Sometimes people don't answer because they didn't hear you. Other times it's because they don't want to hear you.

Most kids don't even consider these rules. Sometime when they were little, their mom and dad must've explained it all, but I don't remember mine doing it. It seems I've always known these things.

Not David, though. He needs to be taught everything. Everything from the fact that a peach is not a funny-looking apple to how having long hair doesn't make someone a girl.

I add to my list:

If you want to get away from someone, check your watch and say, "Sorry, gotta go!"

"It's Mom!" David yells. "Let's go to the video store!"

She's on the porch, locking our front door. I'll get in trouble if Mom finds out I let him think the wrong thing. "I'm depending on you, Catherine," she'll say. "How will he learn to be independent if everyone lets him behave and speak the wrong way?"

"You're going to occupational therapy," I tell David, "at the clinic."

He frowns. "Let's go to the *video store*."

David may not have the sorry-gotta-go rule down, but he's got this one perfect:

If you say something over and over and over, maybe they'll give in to shut you up.

"You're going to OT," I say. "Maybe —"

"Maybe" is all it takes. David twists toward me as far as his seat belt allows, his eyes flashing.

I cover David's mouth with my hand so the movers don't hear him scream.

If you purchased this book without a cover, you should be aware that this book is stolen property. It was reported as "unsold and destroyed" to the publisher, and neither the author nor the publisher has received any payment for this "stripped book." • Copyright © 2006 by Cynthia Lord • Excerpts of *Frog and Toad Are Friends*, copyright © 1970 by Arnold Lobel and from *Frog and Toad Together*, copyright © 1971, 1972 by Arnold Lobel, are reprinted by permission of HarperCollins Publishers. • All rights reserved. Published by Scholastic Inc., *Publishers since 1920*. SCHOLASTIC and associated logos are trademarks and/or registered trademarks of Scholastic Inc. • The publisher does not have any control over and does not assume any responsibility for author or third-party websites or their content. • No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without written permission of the publisher. For information regarding permission, write to Scholastic Inc., Attention: Permissions Department, 557 Broadway, New York, NY 10012. • This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, business establishments, events, or locales is entirely coincidental. • ISBN 978-0-439-44383-8 • 46 45 44 43 42 18 19 20 21 22 • Printed in the U.S.A. 40 • This book was originally published in hardcover by Scholastic Press in 2006. • This edition first printing, 2018 • Book design by Kristina Albertson