

I

“**B**EAT IT, KID! GET LOST! GET OUTTA HERE!”
Adrian tried to move, but he was frozen in place. The screams and cries grew louder and louder. The shadowy faces drew nearer and nearer, until Adrian could feel their hot breath on his face. Bloodshot eyes bulged and sharp fingers stabbed the air around him. He wanted to run, but his feet refused to obey. Adrian was rooted to the ground beneath him. Suddenly, the voices faded and the faces melted into the night.

Adrian lay awake long after The Dream had ended. He felt empty inside, as if something had sucked the air right out of him. His hands were balled up into tight fists, fingernails digging into his palms. Little beads of sweat trickled down his cheeks and under his chin. None of this came as a surprise. It always happened whenever he had The Dream. Slowly, Adrian relaxed his grip and stretched out his hands. He took a few deep breaths, squeezed his eyes shut, and tried to go back to sleep, but it was no use.

Darkness filled the room. Morning was still hours away. Adrian turned on his side and leaned over the edge of his bed, gazing down in the direction of his big brother. He couldn't see Darren, but he could hear deep, steady breathing coming from the bunk below. Unlike Adrian, Darren didn't seem bothered by bad dreams. Darren was a very sound sleeper and usually had a lot of trouble waking up (especially on school days). Adrian hesitated. He really didn't want to disturb Darren, but he couldn't wait till morning. He needed to talk to someone now. Adrian cupped his hands around his mouth and whispered "Darren" a few times. Nothing happened. Darren was still fast asleep. Adrian repeated his brother's name again, only louder this time. Finally, in desperation, he cleared his throat, raised his voice and called out, "Darren! Are you awake?"

From the darkness beneath him Adrian heard his brother stir slightly. Then came a slurred "Whaaa?"

"Darren, wake up! It's important!"

Miraculously, the urgent plea in Adrian's voice did what Darren's alarm clock often could not: it woke him up.

"I'm sorry, but I really need to talk to you." Adrian's words tumbled out one after the other. He spoke quickly and all in one breath, afraid that his brother would drift off to sleep again. "I've been really worried lately. And I'm starting to get scared. I keep having bad dreams." He waited anxiously for his brother to say something.

Darren sighed. His slur was gone. So was all hope of going back to sleep. “What are you afraid of?”

“I don’t want to move,” Adrian declared. “I want to stay right here with all my friends. I don’t want to go to Miami.” Then he voiced his deepest fear. “What if...” He hesitated. “What if nobody likes me there?”

There was silence from below him. *Oh no*, Adrian thought. *He’s sleeping again!* Adrian was wondering whether or not to wake his brother, when Darren spoke.

“Why wouldn’t anyone like you, Adrian? You’re a really popular kid. Everyone likes you here. Why wouldn’t people like you somewhere else?”

“Because...they don’t know me,” Adrian whispered. “Maybe they won’t want to get to know me. Maybe they’ll make fun of me.”

“Why would anyone do that?” Darren was genuinely surprised by Adrian’s questions.

Adrian hated to bring up the next topic, but he swallowed hard and kept on talking. “Remember what happened in New Jersey? At Grandpa Dave’s house? Those boys? What if it happens to me?”

“Listen, Adrian,” Darren said. “It won’t happen to you. It was all a long time ago. Things are different now.” He added roughly, “Just don’t worry about it, okay?” Darren had worked hard to forget that whole episode in New Jersey, and he didn’t like being reminded of it. Then, in a gentler voice,

he added, “I know you’re worried about moving. But you’re not the only one.”

“What do you mean?” asked Adrian. “Everyone *else* around here seems happy about leaving. Look at you! You’re always talking about that new school you’re going to, and the new house we’re moving to, and how you’ll get to play football in a boys’ league, and...everything! I bet you can’t wait to get on that plane!”

Darren said, “You’re right. One part of me does want to leave. I don’t like my school. I wish I could have stayed at my old one. This has been a really rough year for me. So I have to admit I’m looking forward to starting over. But I have friends, too—friends I’m going to miss a lot.” Adrian didn’t say anything, so Darren continued. “Have you ever thought about how Mom and Dad might feel? I bet they don’t like leaving their friends, either. Or family. And maybe they’re a little worried about making such a big change. But they’ve decided that moving is the best thing for all of us right now, so we’re going. And Miami isn’t that far away. What’s the point in moping around all the time? Worrying about it isn’t going to change anything, anyway.” Darren yawned loudly. “Look, Adrian. People move all the time. It’s not the end of the world. Trust me. Everything’s going to be okay.” Darren shifted in his bed and yawned again. “You’ll be fine. I promise.” He turned onto his stomach, mumbled “goodnight” into his pillow, and went back to sleep.

Adrian lay on his back listening to Darren's steady breathing and thinking about what his brother had said. He realized that he had never considered the possibility that anyone else in his family might feel the way he did. Mom and Dad? Worried? They sure never acted worried or nervous around him. Was Darren right? Or, Adrian wondered, *is he just trying to make me feel better?* He closed his eyes and...

Early rays of sunlight flooded the boys' bedroom. A soft, warm breeze lifted the window curtain and Adrian could see the blue, cloudless sky and lush green of rounded mountaintops. Another beautiful July day in the Land of Wood and Water. He hadn't even left, and already he was homesick. Adrian glanced at the clock on the dresser beside the bed. Seven o'clock. He didn't usually get up before eight on Saturdays, but he felt restless. Darren was still asleep. Careful not to wake his brother, Adrian slowly climbed down the ladder from the top bunk and tiptoed across the room. He closed the bedroom door quietly behind him and shuffled downstairs. In the kitchen Charles and Debbie were busy preparing breakfast. Adrian looked for signs of nervousness or worry in his parents' faces, but all he saw were smiles. *Maybe Darren's wrong*, he thought. *Maybe Mom and Dad aren't sorry about leaving at all.* He thought briefly about asking them but decided against it. *What's the point? Even if they are worried, they probably wouldn't tell me.* Adrian decided to say nothing.