

## ***Fish in a Tree***

**By Lynda Mullaly Hunt**

Leaning against the wall in the hallway, I stay quiet. Some little kids walk by, reminding me that I'm in sixth grade- the highest grade in the school. But I feel like a baby.

"Ally? Do you have anything to say?" Mrs. Silver asks.

I'm afraid to open my mouth because sometimes things just come out that get me in more trouble.

Finally, she suggests we go to her office.

I sit in the principal's office staring out the window, silent. I wonder what it would be like to be able to relax at school and not have to worry every second of every minute.

I wish I had my Sketchbook of Impossible Things. It's the only thing that makes me feel like I'm not a waste of space. I like to watch the pictures in my head become real in my book. My recent favorite is a snowman that works in a furnace factory. And then I decide that the craziest, strangest, most unbelievable thing I could ever draw is me doing something right.

Mrs. Silver's sigh brings me back to reality. "Between last year and this year, you've been here for less than five months, Ally, and you've been to visit me far too much. You need to make some changes," she says.

I sit silent.

"It's up to you."

It's not up to me. It's *never* been up to me.

Mrs. Silver's talking is like background noise. Like the radio in the car.

I don't have any words to explain. It was a mistake. And I'm ashamed and I don't feel like sharing that with her.

She takes a breath. "Did you think it would be funny?"

I shake my head.

"Did you want to hurt her?"

I look up quick. "No! I wouldn't hurt her. I just . . ."

And I wonder what I've wondered before. Should I just tell her? It's like my chair is over a trapdoor and there is a button to drop myself. I want to, but I'm afraid. I look up at her. Looking at me all disappointed. Again. And I think that there's no use. They already think I'm a pain, so why add *dumb* to their list? It's not like they can help, anyway. How can you cure dumb?