

Backpack Adventures Series

The Waterfall Ghost

by

Marguerite Swilling

*Produced through the Partnership for
Environmental Education and Rural Health,
Texas A&M University*



Marguerite Swilling, author of the Backpack Adventure Series, has loved reading, writing and science all her life. From writing and directing an original play in sixth grade, she advanced to essay competitions in high school and published poetry at Texas A & M where she majored in English and minored in Earth Science. Although she is a certified secondary teacher, Mrs. Swilling has spent the past twenty-three years in the business world and has written and presented training seminars on a variety of topics. Mrs. Swilling lives in Georgetown, Texas with her husband and two daughters.

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1
2
3 Bobbin's face was flushed as she handed the
4 conductor the ticket for the 3 a.m. train. She turned
5 to Summer and started to say something when the
6 train whistle blew and drowned out all her words.

7 Summer waved at the brave girl dressed like a
8 boy who was heading west toward clear skies and
9 freedom. Summer took the keypad in her hand and
10 pressed the buttons to return to the bookstore.

11 "Yeah, I know, Bobbin. Most people's stories
12 are unbelievable," she said to herself.

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1 “Who’s there? I can see you plain as day. Step
2 forward and prove you’re not a thief nor a spy!”

3 Summer felt for the keypad to her backpack
4 computer. Her heart was racing. She could hear
5 Bobbin’s labored breathing.

6 “Bobbin. Hold on to me and I’ll take you to the
7 train station.”

8 Summer felt Bobbin’s thin hand squeezing her
9 left shoulder. She began typing in the new
10 coordinates: Sept.16, 1853, 2:50 am, Lowell,
11 Massachusetts train station. As she typed, Bobbin’s
12 grip became even tighter. Summer could hear
13 Farnsley’s shuffling gait drawing closer.

14 “It’s Bobbin, isn’t it? I knew you weren’t
15 really dead, you little trouble-maker, but what’ve
16 you got with you?” Farnsley lunged forward and
17 grabbed at the wheel of the chair. “A-ha!”

18 Bobbin screamed, “No you don’t! You leave
19 her alone!” She tried to move the chair, but the
20 other wheel was stuck on the metal bar.

21 “That’s Bobbin’s voice all right!” shouted
22 Farnsley with a wicked laugh. “You’ll wish you
23 was dead when I get through with you!”

24 Farnsley laughed again, but a wheezing cough
25 overtook the laughter and he let go of the wheel to
26 take the pipe from his mouth. In that instant,
27 Summer pressed the key to activate the BPC.
28 Rainbow colored light danced across the looms and
29 blinded Farnsley who dropped his pipe and had to
30 stomp out the embers to keep from catching the mill
31 on fire.

1 “Stop!” hissed Summer. Bobbin abruptly
2 halted and the chair swung slightly to the left, the
3 wheel locking on a metal bar that jutted from the
4 machinery four inches from the rough wooden floor.
5 Summer’s nose picked up a foul smell that seemed
6 to come from the stairs. She sniffed as tears came to
7 her eyes.

8 Bobbin leaned close to Summer’s ear and
9 whispered, “That’s Farnsley, the mill overseer. He’s
10 lighting his pipe with a locofoco, nasty smelling
11 match! They should be outlawed, they’re so
12 dangerous.”

13 Summer’s heart was pounding. Every sound
14 seemed to be magnified, every smell intensified and
15 her eyesight seemed useless. The orange glow
16 seemed to dance in the velvety darkness of the
17 stairwell.

18 Summer and Bobbin stood dead still, afraid to
19 make a sound.

20 “Someone forgot to put out the last gas lamp,”
21 Farnsley’s voice boomed across the mill. Summer
22 watched as a middle-aged man with a scraggly beard
23 stepped from the shadows, the stem of a pipe
24 clenched between thin lips. “Likely trying to burn
25 down the mill,” he muttered as he shuffled from the
26 stairs.

27 Farnsley jerked his head toward the spot where
28 the girls were trying to melt into the darkness. He
29 squinted and his eyes became narrow slits. He
30 peered into the dark.

An Introduction to Backpack Adventures:

Welcome to the coolest club in middle school! Of course, no one outside the club can know just what makes this group so different. The secret is in the backpack.

Roman Castillo, a young teenage technology whiz, developed a powerful mini-computer that can transport people through space and time. He controls the computer with a wireless keypad complete with a screen that displays the co-ordinates for the time and space travel destination. He shared his invention with his best friend, Travis, as well as four others.

Travis Allen, Roman’s best friend since kindergarten, is the son of a veterinarian and loves animals, the outdoors and math. He wears western jeans and boots that highlight his long, lanky profile. He has a short temper except with his stepsister, Summer. He’s very protective of Summer and doesn’t like having her travel with the BPC as the group has nicknamed their awesome device.

Summer Martin, Travis’ stepsister, is two years younger than Travis and Roman. Her bright blue eyes are as merry as her laugh and her blonde hair is cut short and sassy. She loves to read and has a great memory for history and geography. She uses a wheelchair due to a terrible, traffic accident when she was five. Travis and his aunt built a motorized chair for Summer, and she can participate in just about everything with her two best friends, Connie and K.T.

Connie Castillo, Roman’s sister and Summer’s best friend, has long, silky black hair and her dark brown eyes are framed by thick, black lashes. She loves her brother, but sometimes questions the use of the BPC. Quiet and reserved, she is a serious student. Science is her favorite subject and dance is

her favorite pastime. She and Summer have a mutual best friend named K.T.

K.T. Watson, is an only child who loves her best friends, Summer and Connie, like sisters. She wears her curly, jet-black hair in dozens of tiny, tight braids so she'll look more like her favorite athlete, Venus Williams. K.T. is full of energy and courageous. A natural leader, she often instigates the adventures with the BPC. She loves soccer and cheerleading. She helped form the Backpack Club and brought in its newest member: her neighbor, Jace.

Jace Long, classmate and neighbor to K.T., grew up in China and moved first to California and finally to Texas. He loves soccer like K.T., is a whiz at math like Travis, and is especially close to Summer. As the newest member to the Backpack Club, Jace is the most reluctant to use the BPC for travel, but he thinks it's a great tool for communicating between the members and is the first to try the device for help with homework.

1 light played tricks on Summer's eyes. She wanted
2 to ask Bobbin how much farther, but she dared not
3 make a sound.

4 They came to a small room built out of stacked
5 wooden boxes with dingy cloth remnant for a door.
6 Bobbin pulled the curtain back and fastened it
7 behind a nail in the wall. It was too dark in the room
8 for Summer to see, but Bobbin walked in as if
9 daylight flooded the space. In an instant she was out
10 again, pulling the curtain closed. Even in the dim
11 light, Summer could see the twinkle in her eye.

12 "I left my drowning dress and the note draped
13 across the stool. This is my old office. Mary-O's
14 got it messy as a pigsty. Hope it doesn't take her too
15 long to find my message," she whispered.

16 "I'll bet she'll find it in the morning and you'll
17 be long gone by then. Didn't you say you're
18 catching the first train that comes through at three
19 this morning?" Summer whispered back. She could
20 barely hear the clock tower chiming the half hour
21 through the thick red brick walls of the mill. It was
22 a muffled sound, but Summer heard a faint metal
23 clink with each stroke.

24 "Here, I'll push you so we can go faster,"
25 offered Bobbin.

26 She rolled Summer's chair quickly down the
27 walkway while trotting behind her. As they
28 approached the stairwell, Summer saw a tiny orange
29 glow at the top of the stairs. Bobbin's breathing was
30 becoming ragged and she hadn't noticed the strange
31 light.

1 machinery. Like something out of a fairy tale, isn't
2 it?"

3 Summer's eyes grew wider still and she nodded
4 silently.

5 "You can stay here if you like. The walkways
6 are not very wide. This is the only lamp I'll light."
7 Bobbin pointed up to the narrow clerestory windows
8 just below the twelve-foot ceiling. "The windows
9 up above are sealed shut and the dust coats them so
10 badly no light can get in, so I figure you can't see
11 from outside either, but no use taking chances.
12 Besides, I know this place by heart."

13 "I'll follow you. I'll put my chair on manual so
14 I'll be quiet."

15 Slowly, they made their way to the end of the
16 huge looms. Bits of thread clung to the rubber
17 wheels of Summer's chair and covered her hands as
18 she pushed herself. The room seemed to be filled
19 with endless rows of looms and other machinery.
20 Thick bolts of fabric were stacked at the ends of
21 some looms. Baskets with spools of thread six
22 inches in diameter lined the far wall, waiting to be
23 woven into cloth.

24 The girls passed a wide metal stairway that led
25 downstairs to the river level where barges unloaded
26 huge bales of raw cotton into a basement processing
27 room. Summer's eyes were drawn to the steep
28 stairwell that yawned like the mouth of a cave, inky
29 black with a cool, clammy breeze coming from it. It
30 was much harder at this end of the building to make
31 out the machines from the shadows and the murky

"The Waterfall Ghost"

1 Summer leaned back in her wheelchair and
2 peered around a thick wooden bookcase. She could
3 see her mother talking intently with the gray-haired
4 storeowner, Mr. Witherspoon, as they joyfully
5 examined a huge leather-bound book. Summer
6 understood their fascination with the old book—she
7 had found her own treasure in the floor-to-ceiling
8 shelves that lined the shop, Witherspoon's
9 Antiquarian Relics, a bookstore filled with musty
10 manuscripts and antique books.

11 Summer clutched a tiny tract no bigger than a
12 credit card. *The Ghost Inside the Waterfall: A*
13 *Lowell Legend as told by Mary O'Riley* read the
14 mysterious title. As Summer read the few yellowed
15 pages, she was captivated by the story of a textile
16 mill girl who drowned in the waterfall at the factory
17 town of Lowell on September 13, 1853. Her ghost
18 was supposedly seen inside the waterfall in the days
19 after her death, floating in the spray. Summer had
20 been looking for adventure ever since they first
21 arrived in Boston two days ago for neurological tests
22 on her spine. Investigating this girl's legend would
23 distract her while waiting for the test results.

24 Summer ducked back behind the heavy
25 bookcase. Her mind was racing. She typed
26 "Lowell, Massachusetts" into the keypad of her
27 custom made backpack computer and discovered it
28 was a couple hours from Boston. Mom will never
29 make the trip outside the city, Summer thought, but I

1 could go there by myself with the time travel feature
2 of my computer. I've never done that before. I wish
3 Travis were here!

4 Summer, along with her stepbrother, Travis,
5 and four friends who made up the Backpack Club,
6 had vowed never to travel alone with the powerful
7 device which they called the BPC. But what if she
8 could save a life? What if she could change the past
9 for the better?

10 Summer glanced at the back of the store. A
11 sign read "Ladies Room" on a wide oak door with a
12 transom above it. That would give her some privacy
13 and she could go and return without losing any time.
14 Her mother would never miss her. She pressed a
15 button that started the motorized wheelchair rolling.

16 "Mom, I'm going to the bathroom," she called
17 as she pushed the heavy door ajar. Summer slid the
18 lock on the door and nervously typed "September
19 15, 1853, Pawtucket Falls, Lowell, Massachusetts"
20 into the keypad. As her finger hit the last command,
21 Summer had a sense of dread that she was sending
22 herself right into the falls. Too late! The rainbow
23 light sparkled, enveloping her in colors as a rushing
24 sound filled her ears.

25 The rushing turned into a roar and the colors
26 seemed to crystallize into tiny drops of water that
27 clung to Summer's golden hair. Summer realized
28 with relief she was not *in* the waterfall, but very near
29 it on a grassy area by a grove of maple trees. She
30 watched water from the Merrimack River cascade
31 over rocks in a series of falls.

1 They had seen no one since all the girls had a
2 curfew from 10 p.m. until 4 a.m. when they went
3 back to work. The maintenance crews had finished
4 at eleven and the hour just after midnight was the
5 quietest time in Lowell.

6 Bobbin opened the door just wide enough for
7 Summer's chair and softly closed it behind them.
8 The room was so dark Summer couldn't see her
9 hand in front of her face. She was acutely aware of
10 her other senses.

11 She could hear Bobbin's raspy breath. The
12 smell of fabric dye, sweat and stale air filled
13 Summer's lungs and a fine dust tickled her nose.
14 Don't sneeze, she thought. Please don't sneeze!
15 Summer tried to breathe through her mouth. She
16 could taste the chalky dust at the back of her throat.
17 Summer leaned back, her hands on the buttons that
18 guided the wheelchair, ready to flee. She sensed
19 something massive looming in front of her in the
20 dark. A tiny tapping behind her sent shivers down
21 her spine.

22 Suddenly, a light flared as Bobbin ignited the
23 gas lamp on the wall by the door. Summer gasped
24 and Bobbin clamped her hand over Summer's mouth
25 just before she screamed. Two feet in front of
26 Summer was a ten-foot-high black iron machine
27 with pieces like arms that extended over the narrow
28 walkway on either side of the monstrosity.

29 Bobbin removed her hand and whispered over
30 Summer's shoulder, "Sorry I didn't warn you about
31 Grimm. That's what we call this little piece of

1 "I'm going to leave this little note attached to
2 my drowning dress and drop it on Miss Mary-O's
3 bed while she sleeps."

4 "But that would be taking an awful chance."
5 Summer's normally cautious nature recoiled at the
6 idea of such a risky plan.

7 Bobbin shrugged. "I can be quiet. I want
8 Mary-O to think twice before she torments Sheila
9 again!"

10 "But if you put it on her bed, she might hide it
11 and not even tell anyone."

12 Bobbin hesitated. She had been counting on
13 Mary-O's superstitious nature, but she knew the
14 bully was cunning and deceptive too. She might
15 indeed hide the note and the dress. From what she
16 had learned of her new friend, Summer was very
17 smart and clever too. Was it worth the risk just to
18 torment Mary-O? Even in the dim light from the
19 quarter moon, Summer could see the ambivalence
20 on Bobbin's face.

21 "Maybe there's another way to deliver the
22 note," suggested Summer. "I have an idea."
23

24
25 *C-r-r-r-e-e-e-a-a-a-k-k-k.* The hinges of the
26 massive wooden door groaned as Bobbin slowly
27 pushed against the entrance to the main floor of the
28 mill. Summer could hear the clock tower chiming
29 the quarter hour. It had taken them fifteen minutes
30 to navigate the shadowy streets leading from the
31 park to the mill where Bobbin and Mary-O worked.

1 As impressive as the river was, Summer was
2 astounded to see she was in a large town that
3 reached to the water's edge. The wooded area she
4 sat in seemed to be a city park.

5 Huge five-story buildings lined the farther
6 bank, and upriver Summer could see locks and
7 canals that fed river traffic to the massive factories.
8 Long rows of two story buildings were interspersed
9 with the factories and everywhere people bustled
10 along the roadways and canal bridges, moving
11 between the buildings and the railroad tracks that
12 lined the streets.

13 Suddenly the sound of young girls' voices
14 startled Summer and she turned in her chair to see a
15 group of mill girls running up from the riverbank
16 and shrieking in fear. She remembered what had
17 brought her here and dreaded what might be the
18 cause of their screams. A tall girl of about eighteen
19 with bright red hair and wide green eyes was
20 screaming the loudest and running straight for
21 Summer as if she didn't see her or her chair.

22 "Stop!" Summer shouted. "What's the matter
23 with you?"

24 The redhead stopped in her tracks and eyed
25 Summer suspiciously. The others gathered behind
26 her, a mob with red or dark brown hair, wide eyes
27 and dingy cotton dresses. None was as tall as the
28 first girl. No one smiled at Summer.

29 "Well, miss, you'd be scared half out of your
30 wits if you'd seen a ghost, now, wouldn't you?" the

1 girl answered with a sneer. Her heavy Irish brogue
2 gave her away as a recent immigrant.

3 “A ghost? Just now, today?” Summer started to
4 argue with them, but decided she needed to pretend
5 to have no knowledge of the ghost.

6 “Aye, there in the river falls. ’Twas Bobbin,
7 for sure,” answered a tiny girl about nine years old
8 who stepped forward. She was covered in dirt and
9 wore no shoes. Her nose was crusted with mucus.
10 The tall redhead looked at her with contempt and
11 yanked her back.

12 “Mind your manners, Sheila, or you’ll be
13 swimming with the ghost soon enough,” snarled the
14 redhead through gritted teeth. The younger girl
15 cringed and scurried away toward a low building
16 beyond the trees.

17 Summer jumped when she heard the name
18 “Bobbin,” for that had been the name of the dead
19 girl in the tiny book she still clutched in her left
20 hand. So there really had been a drowning! Was
21 there really a ghost now?

22 “Who are you?” demanded the tall girl, her
23 eyes glaring. A harsh cough erupted from her chest
24 and she spat phlegm onto the ground and wiped her
25 mouth with the back of her hand. Summer couldn’t
26 figure out what she had done to make the girl so
27 mad except having seen her scared out of her wits.
28 The long-legged redhead looked dangerous now that
29 she wasn’t screaming and it was clear that the other
30 girls feared her. Summer had to think fast to keep
31 control of the situation.

1 transforming. No one would believe the wiry youth
2 was not a boy.

3 “Only one thing left to do, but we’ll have
4 to wait till dark,” Bobbin said taking a seat on the
5 dirt in front of Summer. “Looks like you’ve plenty
6 of time to tell me all about how this chair moves by
7 itself. And how you flew!”

8
9
10 Hours after the sun went down, Bobbin was
11 still peppering Summer with questions about life in
12 the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Bobbin had
13 already declined Summer’s insistent offer to travel
14 with her back to the future. She said she’d seen
15 enough of the fickleness of machines to trust some
16 little buttons to carry her through space and time.
17 Instead Bobbin tempted Summer with excerpts from
18 her Aunt Ruth’s letter—visions of wide, open spaces
19 and unspoiled vistas.

20 The clock tower on the Lowell Mill factory
21 chimed midnight. Bobbin pulled the bush branches
22 apart and the girls left their sanctuary. Summer was
23 very hungry, but Bobbin seemed not to notice they
24 had talked past supper.

25 “Now for the final farewell. I’m not scared for
26 myself, Summer, but I do worry about little Sheila.
27 Mary-O is so rough with her and she’s not strong
28 like I am. She’s been sick a lot, too, like all of us,
29 yet never feeling any better, even on the day off.”

30 “So what do you have planned?”

1 center of a four-foot drop below a large boulder in
2 the middle of the river.

3 "See that spot there. I found a crevice behind
4 the falls that leads to a flat rock, a sort of miniature
5 cave behind the water. The ledge is very narrow, so
6 only someone very thin and small can fit there.
7 Once I reach the flat rock, I can kneel upright and
8 spread my arms into the spray. I imagine it looks
9 like I'm floating. I tore my clothes to make it look
10 like I was beat upon the rocks. Mary-O is
11 superstitious. She'll swear she's seen a ghost!"

12 "Or a water fairy! You're very clever,
13 Bobbin!"

14 "I thought it out very carefully once Aunt Ruth
15 left. I put a change of clothes here in this bush and
16 all my money's hidden nearby. I've food stashed
17 near the train station and I know the schedule by
18 heart. I'll take the trains till I reach St Louis." As
19 she talked, Bobbin changed out of the tattered
20 clothes into boys' clothes: a pair of black breeches
21 and a long sleeved gray cotton shirt.

22 "How did you get boys' clothes?" asked
23 Summer.

24 "Had my aunt send them. Here," Bobbin said
25 as she handed Summer a pair of scissors. "You can
26 help me cut my hair like a boy."

27 Summer reluctantly took the scissors and cut
28 Bobbin's long brown tresses just below her ears.
29 Then Bobbin took a beat-up, floppy black hat and
30 plopped it on her head. The effect was

1 "I'm, um, Miss, um, Miss Summer, the owner's
2 niece." Summer looked at the signs atop the
3 building closest to her. "Miss Summer Lowell," she
4 added, reading the name of the factory and hoping
5 that it would protect her somehow.

6 The girl straightened her back and stopped
7 frowning. The other girls stepped back two paces
8 and left the tall one standing alone.

9 "What's your name and why were you going to
10 run over me?" Summer noticed the tacit respect they
11 gave her and decided to use its power.

12 "They call me Mary-O and I—we—meant you
13 no harm. We just came to pay respects, so to speak,
14 to Bobbin who drowned in the falls two days ago.
15 She won't have no proper wake nor burial since her
16 body ain't been found."

17 "Two days ago? But I thought..." Summer
18 hesitated. She must have gotten the days wrong!
19 Mary-O was watching her, she mustn't act confused.
20 "I thought they would at least have a funeral. What
21 about her family?"

22 "She's an orphan like me. That's how we got
23 so—close. No one to care for us." Mary-O put on a
24 face of mock sadness that looked silly on her
25 towering frame. "I told her not to swim in the river
26 or I'd steal..."

27 Suddenly, her eyes went wide again. "That's
28 why I seen the ghost today! Bobbin said she'd come
29 back as a water fairy if I ever..."

30 Now the other girls backed farther away from
31 Mary-O. Summer could see the fear in their eyes as

1 Mary-O's hands flew to her mouth to stifle a cry of
2 anguish. The others took off in the same direction
3 as the little girl called Sheila and left Mary-O alone
4 with Summer. Mary-O coughed again and started to
5 choke on the phlegm. She caught her breath and
6 used the hem of her dress as a handkerchief.

7 "Show me the place you saw Bobbin," Summer
8 commanded. Her wheelchair whirled into motion,
9 giving Mary-O another fright. She was so overcome
10 with fear she stumbled and fell backward, then
11 rolled onto her stomach and started crawling away
12 from Summer.

13 Summer started to laugh then remembered
14 Bobbin. She had to know if there really was a
15 ghost—or a body—in the falls. She watched Mary-
16 O trail after the others.

17 Summer quickly found the path the girls had
18 made to the river and carefully followed it closer
19 and closer to the water's edge. The roar of the falls
20 was deafening and in places the path was muddy and
21 slick. Rocks jutted into the edge of the path
22 threatening to snag a wheel. I'd better be careful or
23 I'm going to be the one swimming with the ghost,
24 she thought with a twinge of fear.

25 Summer peered into the water but could see no
26 body or anything resembling a ghost. She felt the
27 urge to call out to this poor, drowned, little girl, as if
28 just saying her name might change the past. Yet,
29 she felt self-conscious as if someone were watching
30 her.

1 "Well, I trusted you not to turn me in. Miss
2 Summer, I've seen a boll of dirty white cotton
3 become a piece of soft sky blue cloth that'll last like
4 iron. I've heard how Mr. Lowell went to England
5 and memorized the plans for making the looms and
6 came back and built better machines and started a
7 whole new industry." Bobbin stifled a cough and
8 swallowed hard. Summer could see her chest heave
9 as she tried to keep from coughing.

10 Bobbin cleared her throat and spoke in a
11 hoarse, soft voice. "My mother, rest her soul, was a
12 poor farmer's daughter who became a Lowell
13 factory girl and earned a living and learned to read
14 and write. She went back home and married a
15 storekeeper, my father. After they died, my aunt
16 sent for me to come stay with her in Lowell. By
17 then, the factories were hiring younger and younger
18 girls. I was so tiny they called me Bobbin, but I was
19 the best at keeping the machines running. I can see
20 how they work and fix them when they break.
21 People can't believe a girl can work on a machine.
22 Most people's stories are unbelievable, Miss."

23 There was an uncomfortable silence as the two
24 girls faced one another. Summer felt the tiny book
25 in her hand and remembered why she came here.
26 She broke the silence.

27 "No more secrets between us, then. Tell me,
28 Bobbin, how your ghost floats in the waterfall."

29 A slow smile spread across Bobbin's freckled
30 cheeks. She pulled apart the bush and pointed to the

1 “So, you’re going to California? Oh, it’s
2 beautiful! We flew to L.A. and visited Hollywood
3 and of course, Disneyland. My brother went surfing
4 at Pacific Beach when we vaca...” Summer stopped.
5 Bobbin was staring at her.

6 “*You flew?*”

7 “Well, um, you see, that’s just an expression,
8 yeah, that they use in California ...because its’ so
9 hilly... you can see like a bird... people in
10 California have a different way of speaking. Lots of
11 slang expressions.”

12 Bobbin eyed Summer warily.

13 “You’re not Mr. Lowell’s niece, are you?”

14 “No.”

15 “And you don’t lie well, either, do you?”

16 “No.”

17 “Well, you best be glad Mary-O is so dense or
18 she’d have seen you weren’t a Lowell heiress and
19 pushed this contraption into the river. But then you
20 almost did that yourself. Here. Here’s your book.”
21 She tossed the tiny pamphlet into Summer’s lap.

22 Summer was embarrassed she had been caught
23 in a lie. But how could she tell the truth? What
24 would Bobbin think? The brown water poured over
25 the rocks below them and the only sound in the bush
26 was the chirping of tiny wrens.

27 “Bobbin, I’m sorry I lied to you. The truth
28 sounds so far-fetched that I didn’t trust you to
29 believe me. I was afraid if I told you the truth,
30 you’d turn me in to the authorities. My story is just
31 too unbelievable.”

1 She looked behind her. No one. Nothing but
2 the trees and tall grass of the park on this bit of
3 undeveloped riverbank.

4 “Bobbin,” Summer whispered hoarsely. She
5 leaned forward, toward the rushing water, and spoke
6 loudly. “Bobbin, are you there?”

7 The river washed away her words, drowning
8 out all sounds but its own. Brown water swirled and
9 eddied and leaped off the jagged rocks as the water
10 roiled past the muddy pathway.

11 Summer lifted her hands to her mouth to shout
12 out loud the lost girl’s name. As she did, the tiny
13 book flew out of her hand and she lunged forward to
14 grab it. The wheelchair jerked and started sliding
15 precariously toward the river. Summer tried to
16 apply the brakes, but the slippery slope gave the
17 wheels no traction. She clutched her backpack in
18 her lap.

19 Suddenly, a young girl, dressed in an absurd
20 patchwork of cotton fabric remnants, jumped in
21 front of Summer and grabbed the wheelchair,
22 stopping it inches from the riverbank drop off. In
23 her hand was the tiny book. Her long, brown hair
24 was slicked back and clean, her face covered with
25 freckles, and a spark played in her lively brown
26 eyes. Her body was wiry and lithe.

27 “Hello. My name’s Bobbin. If you don’t mind,
28 I’d rather us not go swimming just now.” Her strong
29 arms maneuvered the wheelchair onto another
30 pathway as she continued to talk. “This very

1 unusual contraption deserves a closer look. If you
2 will allow me to roll you to my newest domicile.”

3 Before Summer could protest, Bobbin had her
4 hidden in a large shrub that was hollowed out like a
5 cave. It was perched on an outcropping over the
6 water and Bobbin pulled a few branches over the
7 opening, sealing them from view from the outside.

8 It took a moment for Summer’s eyes to adjust
9 to the leaf-filtered light inside the shrub. She could
10 see long thorns poking outward, but this space had
11 been ingeniously cleared and she felt quite secure.
12 The sound of the rushing water was near, but it was
13 not so terrifying here.

14 Bobbin stood in front of Summer, her
15 appearance even more bizarre in the shadowy light.
16 But a great big grin seemed stuck on her face as if
17 saving someone from falling into the river was an
18 everyday occurrence. Summer took a deep breath
19 and replied.

20 “Thanks for saving my life. You *are* alive, too,
21 aren’t you?”

22 Bobbin pinched herself and let out a little yelp.
23 “Never more so!”

24 “Well, those girls back there think you’re a
25 ghost!”

26 Bobbin laughed out loud but started coughing
27 like Mary-O. It took her a long time to catch her
28 breath. Finally, she could continue.

29 “That’s my intention. Makes it easier to leave
30 if they all think I’m dead.” She drew a raspy breath.
31 “I saw how you frightened Mary-O. Serves her

1 right! Years ago, to be a Lowell Mill girl was a
2 chance for a better life. But now... Let’s just say, I
3 don’t take to letting Mary-O or her followers bully
4 me. She threatens to steal my clothes when I go
5 swimming just because she can’t swim. And she’s
6 sweet-talked Mr. Farnsley into giving her my job. I
7 work hard for my wages and I’ve been here four
8 years longer than those newcomers. I’ve got
9 seniority even if I’m five years younger than Mary.”

10 “Work? But you’re just a child.” Summer
11 couldn’t imagine the type of job a slightly built girl
12 like Bobbin could do.

13 “I’m thirteen, Miss, and I’ve worked my way
14 up from bobbin tender to spinner to cloth maker.
15 I’ve done about every job there is in Lowell
16 factories. I’m better than old Farnsley, the mill
17 overseer. I think he’s afraid I’ll make him look bad
18 to the corporation’s owners. That’s why he sides
19 with Mary-O and lets her boss all the girls. Didn’t
20 used to be like that when my Aunt Ruth was here.
21 But she’s been gone six months. Got a letter from
22 her three days ago.” Bobbin’s face had softened
23 when she mentioned her aunt and a gentle smile lit
24 her countenance.

25 “Where did your aunt go?”

26 “California. May not be like ’49, but there’s
27 still gold there and a fortune to be made by those
28 willing to risk some comfort. She took her life
29 savings and headed west by stagecoach. Me, I
30 figure I’ll go by wagon train once I reach St. Louis.”