

Meeting Arnie

Mr. Poplar claps his hands twice, his signal to cut the chatter. Mr. Poplar scans the room and then looks at Arnie. "Your new desk will be the fourth one in the third row." He points to the empty spot next to Adi.

Wait a miunet! Adi's anger explodes in her head as she jerks her head back up. No way! This is Addy's desk. That guy can't sit here. He just can't! Mr. Poplar couldn't have forgotten about Addy. She was special to our class.

Arnie slowly walks toward the empty desk and hangs his backpack on the back of the chair. He turns and shyly smiles at Adi, but then he quickly puts down his head as he sees her furious face.

I am aghast. Then suddenly she feels bad. It's not his fault he has to sit in Addy's desk. She's not here, and he is. Man, I have to be nice, but I'm just not ready for niceness. Not now.

When morning lessons are finally over, the recess signal sounds, and all students go to the playground. "My dear, dear friend," Adi says aloud to herself. "I miss you so much. I just don't know what to do without you here. My inside is boiling with anger and crying at the same time. Addy, I don't think you'd be proud of me today. I haven't looked at the new boy at all. I know he's looked my way a few times. I can sense the hurt he must be feeling. He has to be confused. He's the new kid, just wanting to be liked and fit in. He's hoping to make a friend. He should get a smile from me, but not today." Adi walks over to her favorite spot and sits on the smooth crook of a small branch, where Addy and she sat every morning recess and made their plans for that day.

"Hi, I'm Arnie," Adi hears from the body standing in front of her. "May I join you?"

"No!" Adi yells, jumps up, and stomps away. She says to herself, "Why did I do that? Why am I being so mean to him? But I can't stop walking. I'm running." Adi doesn't even stop at the warning rope. No one should ever cross that rope. It's there to point out the sealed-up crack in the limb.

The crack was made about twenty years ago. There are some weird tales about how it was made and who made it, but Adi never really paid attention to them. Right now, she doesn't care about the sealed crack, nor the warning rope. She hears footsteps behind her. She just has to get away. She leaps the crack without even thinking.

Suddenly, she hears a shriek. "Help!" hollers Arnie. Adi pivots and sees that he slipped into the crack. Wait, Adi quickly thinks. That was sealed. You can't fall through something that's sealed. Yet Arnie's feet are dangling out of the limb. His body below the waist isn't showing. His elbows are frantically digging into the dirt around the hole. His hands are spread apart with his fingers stiff. His face is white. His eyes are wide. Then he quickly looks down and grabs at a broken vein near the opening. Arnie's knuckles turn white from gripping so hard. The wind must be strong outside the community today because Arnie's body is swinging back and forth. His chest slams into one side of the crack. Then his back jams into the

other side, back and forth, quickly back and forth. Adi hears the slapping sounds as his lower body contacts the outer bark. He's terrified. I know this is my fault! I must do something and do it quickly! Adi thinks. She runs back to Arnie. Luckily, she remembers the crack safety lessons about not getting too close to the opening. Arnie's body was already making the crack bigger. Adi wants to reach out her arm and grab him, but he could panic, grab her, and pull them both through. Maybe I can leap over him and go for help. No there just isn't enough time, Adi quickly reasons. Arnie needs me now!

She spots a large vein growing close to the crack, pulls it away from its growth spot, and tears it open. She knows she isn't supposed to break the veins, but that's too bad. She kneels down, jams her foot in the other side of the vein break, and quickly shoves the vein over to Arnie. He looks too afraid to grasp the larger vein.

"Grab it with your right hand!" Adi yells. "You can do it. Your left arm is in the stronger spot. It'll hold you." She stares straight into his eyes. She won't let him look away. It's as if she's willing her strength into him.

Arnie releases his right hand and grasps at the vein. He misses. He shrieks and claws at the dirt, but then he grabs at it again. This time, he gets it. He takes a deep breath and then grabs the vein with his left hand.

Suddenly, it hits her. Now she has to pull Arnie out. He just put his life into her hands. Suddenly she's the frightened one, but there's no choice. She starts to pull. Nothing happens. She pulls again, this time slower and steadier. Her arms and legs ache, but she keeps pulling. Arnie's body starts to slide out of the crack. As his knees come in, he uses his legs to help push. They work together and get him out. Both kids sink onto the ground and just stare.

Footsteps are approaching their spot. Next they hear yelling. Mr. Poplar, the twins, and some other teachers run over. Mr. Poplar jumps the crack and comes to them. The others wait until he helps the two students back over the crack. Just as all three of them get to a safe spot, they hear the wind howl and feel the branch sway. Crack! The opening doubles in size. They made it out just in time.

The teachers help the kids back to the school building and take them straight to Nurse Willow's office. She checks out both students and then releases them back to class. As they walk out of her office, they realize they are in a lot of trouble.

A short time later, the dismissal signal sounds, and Adi leaves the school. On her way home, she passes Michael again. Strange. He's not usually here after school, she thinks.

"Who are you, Adi?" he asks. Her grin grows. "Hi, I am Adi, a different individual." And then she continues walking home. He smiles back.

As she gets home, she only wants to go to her room, but her mom meets her at the door. Her look tells Adi that Mr. Poplar already spoke with her and told her what happened. She hugs her girl hard. Then she lets go and kisses her on the head. She doesn't say anything. She just lets Adi go to her room.

Adi begins to write in her journal.

Dear Addy, This was an unbelievable day! I really didn't want to go to school. I missed you so much. I hated seeing your desk empty. I know you were watching me today. Is the view amazing from heaven? I hope I didn't embarrass you the way I treated Arnie. It's hard enough being the new kid without having the girl next to you showering you with hatred. I know he kept looking my way during math class. He even tried to help me with an algebra equation, but I only glared at him. Addy, why did Arnie have to follow me at recess? If he'd have just left me alone, the whole scary episode wouldn't have happened, and I wouldn't be in a heap of trouble with Ms. Ash. And why did the sealant break? That old crack is about twenty years old. You know the civil engineers are always checking on it. They would have recoated it if the sealant seemed weak. Yet somehow, the crack was open, and Arnie slipped into it. Who called for help? Was it the twins? No way. Those two would purposely ignore my cries for help. Wouldn't they? Yet they were there with Mr. Poplar. Why do those two guys always seem to be around when odd things happen? Okay. I'm in deep trouble, but I'm just thankful Arnie's safe. I think I made a new friend. I still miss you, Addy. You will always be my twin, the one with whom I share my thoughts and dreams. I know you will always be here, and through these words, we will stay friends. I'm tired. I'm glad Mr. Poplar canceled homework tonight. Tomorrow I must see the principal. I know I'll pay for my stupid moves that almost cost Arnie his life, but that's tomorrow. Tonight, I need to sleep. To you, adieu. Oh yeah, Michael was there after school. It was as if he were waiting for me. Weird, huh? Good night, Addy.