

## THE FLOOD, THREE GIRLS AND A CAT

### The Red Boat

The rain beat against our upstairs bedroom windows like a lady incessantly tapping her fingers on the table. I could hear the water sloshing and lapping against the inside walls of our living room. My heart thumped so hard someone could hear it somewhere echoing through the valley as far as the distant hills past Sacramento.

I glanced back at Amanda, sleeping on my bed. Her teddy bear lay wide-eyed trapped by her small, clutching arm. As I tiptoed towards the staircase and looked down, I had the feeling I was about to descend Mount Everest, and then plunge into an ocean.

I inched down the stairs into the entry hall and slipped my feet into the cold, dark water. I didn't care if my tennis shoes got wet, or my jeans. The freezing water tickled, bubble by bubble, up my body until it reached my neck and threatened my chattering teeth.

Upstairs Amanda started whimpering like a baby. Then came the yelling. "Where are you? Come back! Kirsten, come back!"

"I'm coming in a minute," I yelled back to her firmly, pulling the freezing water alongside my body with my fingers joined like they were glued. "Just wait right there and don't move!" I yelled, as I splashed like a landing water bird and my cold legs pushed forward.

As I braved it through the dirty water in the living room to the outside of the house by the back double doors, I felt like an elephant pushing its whole body against a giant tree, leaning its shoulder against the doors. I grunted as the doors and I opened like we were one solid object.

I pushed through the cluttered, muddy water, and I held my head high like I was allergic to something itching me from my clothes. I dragged myself around the house and pushed myself over to the open garage door, managing to enter the flooded garage, and aimed myself, like the Leaning Tower of Pisa, in the direction of our red rowboat hanging on the garage wall.

The water was rising so fast, I wondered if I would have to swim any minute.

The boat was growing bigger, beckoning me to use it for what I now considered to be the real reason Dad had bought it, though, of course, no one could have guessed it at the time.

Just like a dog digging a hole in the earth, the tantalizing scent of a bone driving it on, I was determined to find our mom and dad. They were somewhere. They wouldn't just leave us alone all night unless they were in trouble or, who knows, dead. I had to find them, no matter what it would take to find out why they didn't come home the night before.