

Stacey Matson

Eleven
out of
Ten

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Prologue

The Ten-Point Scale

Lake and I were lying around in our tree house late one afternoon, too hot to do anything else, when she turned and stared deep into my eyes before declaring, “Albieeeee . . . I’m bored.”

“Me toooooo,” I replied.

Lake and I were almost twins, if cousins could be twins. Our moms are sisters and we were born only four months apart, so we were totally in sync. Even when we were apart, we could tell what the other was thinking. Not that we were ever apart. Not that we ever wanted to be apart.

Lake let out a yell at the top of her lungs. “ALBIE, I’M BOOOOOOOORED!”

I laughed. “MEEEEEE TOOOOOOOOO!”

There was no answer. My little brother, Lincoln, was at a friend’s house, and all the parents were inside and couldn’t hear us.

It was the end of April, and weirdly hot. Like, midsummer hot. Lake hadn’t gotten the above-ground pool yet. That wouldn’t be part of our lives for another two weeks.

“Wouldn’t swimming be perfect right now?” I said.

“Swimming right now would make this the best day of our lives,” Lake said. “I give swimming ten out of ten.”

“I give it an eleven out of ten,” I replied.

Lake sat up. “Let’s rate everything. On a scale from one to ten. ‘Albie and Lake’s Super Scale of Everything.’”

“Seven being the highest,” I replied.

She looked confused.

I pushed her. “It was a joke!”

She laughed. “I’m going to get paper so we can keep track.”

We kept a plastic tote full of art supplies in the tree house for occasions just like this. Lake loved making lists and writing down plans. We had a whole journal full of them, everything from “Our Top-Ten Favourite Christmas Gifts We Want” to “The Worst Jobs in the World” (this one was mostly anything that had to do with toilets and garbage).

“So, zero is the lowest, and ten is the highest. I give this tree house an . . . eight,” I said.

“Only an eight?”

“It needs more snacks and a fridge full of pop.”

Lake nodded. “Fair points. All right. I will agree with eight. My turn. I give popcorn a ten.”

“A ten?” I said. “I feel like there’s different kinds of popcorn and they all rate differently. Like, microwave popcorn is a six. Movie popcorn is an eight. Kettle corn is a nine. And your dad’s popcorn that he makes? That’s the only ten.”

Lake thought about this. “That’s pretty asstute, Albie,” she said, putting a long emphasis on the first syllable of astute and making me laugh.

“Well, we have to be asstute. Specificity!” I called, making Lake laugh.

“To be specific: The smell of swimming. That’s a ten.” Lake said this like she was a university professor.

“What?!”

Lake gave me a withering look. “You know. The smell of a pool. The chemical smell.”

“You want to give the smell of chlorine a ten?” I asked.

“Yeah, of course. It means there’s a pool nearby. I love that smell.”

I shrugged. “Okay. We can give chlorine a ten.” I didn’t really want to, but there was no point in arguing with Lake; she always won anyway.

“But swimming itself is an eleven out of ten,” Lake said.

“Oh, one hundred percent eleven out of ten,” I agreed.

We continued. Classical music: two. (Lake’s choice.) Country music: five. (Lake’s choice.) Tire swings: seven. (My choice.) Camping: six. (I wanted to give it way less because it’s so boring sometimes, but Lake wanted to give it an eight because she likes not having to shower.) Potatoes got a three from me because I don’t like them, but Lake knows this and so she compromised on a five because she loves them.

“Birds get a ten,” Lake said.

“Birds? All birds? What about pigeons? Or seagulls?” I asked.

“All birds. They get a ten.” Lake looked at me. “It’s not even a question. The same way you would give all croissants a ten.” She was right. Croissants could never be bad, in my opinion.

Here’s more:

Minecraft: 8

Full House: 9

Fuller House: 6

Eating outside in the spring: 7; Eating outside in the summer: 3 (because of the wasps)

Sandy beaches: 6; Rocky beaches: 9

Mosquitoes: 0

Wasps: -10

Bears in the forest far away: 8

Bears in the yard: 2

Grocery shopping: 1

Carrots: 4 if they’re from the store; 8 if they’re right from the garden

Blueberries: 9

All other berries: 10

We spent the rest of the afternoon rating everything we could think of. When Lincoln came home, he joined us. He added a couple of his own ratings, like giving garbage trucks

a ten. (Why are so many little kids obsessed with garbage trucks?) He then gave Lego a ten, Uno a ten and Rainbow Otter, his stuffie, a ten. He gave everything a ten, but I don’t think he really understood the game. Eventually, my mom came out and yelled at me to come in and for Lake to go home. After the second time she did that, I slid down the slide and landed in the mud.

“Hey!” I called up.

Lake looked down at me.

“I give you one hundred! One hundred out of ten!”

“I give you a thousand, Alberta Marie Vand!”

“I give you infinity, Lake Ernestine Fortin-Carpentier!”

“Infinity plus one, Alberta Marie Vand the Third!”

After that day, we rated everything we could until July 5.

July 5, by the way, gets the lowest score of anything ever, of all time. Minus a trillion, times infinity, divided by one.