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Faith Thoma

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Where Does the Sky End?

Faith Thoma

"KOWABUNGA! Hey, Leonardo, the pizza dude's here! Soooooo, let's celebrate!" cried a Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle in a California surfer voice.

Brian and I had just finished putting the dishes away and were settled in the family room with paper and a shoebox full of crayons. On the TV in front of us, Brian's favorite cartoon gladiators decided to take a break from fighting crime to have a party in the city sewer. I noticed that the turtles' home was remarkably clean, ventilated and well-lighted for an underground sewer. Looking down, I smoothed the blank sheet of paper in front of me. "What should I draw?"

Already deep into his picture, Brian murmured, "A giant fly eating a frog."

"No. There's no such thing as a giant fly," I scoffed. "How about just a frog?"

"Okay." He clutched his green Crayola tighter and zagged it passionately across his paper. "But make him gettin' a fly."

I sighed, settled into a comfortable kneel, and selected a Crayola from the battered shoebox. "That sounds reasonable."

"DUDE! The pizza's moving! It's alive!" screamed the television. "Mutant pizza-- let's get it! TURTLE POWER!"

I winced at the cacophony and turned it down with the remote.

"Hey!" Brian protested, looking up. "I can't hear it!"

"You can still hear it," I insisted with babysitter authority. "Are you really watching anyways?"

His jaw set. "Yes. Please turn it up a little."

I did. "But I don't see how you can concentrate on drawing and watch TV at the same time."

He watched half-shelled heroes battling the possessed pizza for a minute, then he returned to his artwork. The room was silent, except for the turtle adventures and his scribbling.

I carefully outlined my frog's lilypad, my mind beginning to wander. Today was Sunday. That meant I had to read five pages in my U.S. history text, write a speech and study for a physics quiz before retiring for the night. I groaned.

My thoughts were interrupted by a small hand tugging on my arm.

"Hey! Sam? Are you okay? Finish your picture," urged Brian. He was staring at me with wide eyes.

"Oh." I shook my head to clear it. "I'm sorry." I hadn't even remembered setting my Crayola down, but I picked it up and continued anyway.

"What happened?"

"Nothing. I was just thinking ... is there an encyclopedia set somewhere around here?"

"Why?" Brian asked.

"Well, I like to be exact in my drawing. I'll copy a picture of a frog instead of trying to create my own."

"In Dad's office." He dug back into the crayon box. I soon returned with the "F" volume of World Book. I leafed through it. "There. How about this one?" I asked him, showing him a picture of a spotted, brownish-green leopard frog.

"Great! But when you draw him, blow him up!"

"You want to see his insides! Sorry, but I don't remember that much from biology last year . . ."

"No, what I meant was blow up his throat, like when he's croaking. Puff it up real big, and give him scary red eyes, and don't forget the fly."

I sighed. "A frog can't croak and eat at the same time."

"Why not?"

Because it's physically impossible."

Crestfallen, he muttered, "It's just a picture. Doesn't matter if it's impossible or not. Just draw him exploding."

I didn't take him seriously. "So do you want him eating or croaking?"

"I don't care anymore. When are my mom and dad coming home?"

"Not until after you go to bed."

"Real late?"

"Extremely late." I slowly copied an open-mouthed leopard frog onto my paper, adding a long tongue extending to snatch a fly. Brian watched with renewed interest.

"Now for the background, I'll draw a swamp," I said.

"Wait. You've got to give the fly wings. It's just a black dot."

"In relation to the size of the frog, the fly would barely show," I explained patiently. "It's too big as it is in the first place. You wouldn't be close enough to see wings."

"It looks like he's eating a piece of dirt."

I lettered the word "FLY" next to the insect and drew an arrow to him. Brian wriggled with nervous dissatisfaction. "You didn't have to do that. You've ruined the picture."

"Since when are you so critical of my art?" I demanded softly. "You don't see me telling you how to draw."

"You asked me what you should draw. I'm just telling you," he said, still wiggling anxiously.

"Hey, buddy, I'm sorry," I said kindly. I needed to change the subject. "Can I please see your picture?"

His face brightened. "Okay!" He slid the sheet over to me.

I looked at it. "Oh, you're doing great so far! I like the house- is that your family I see through the windows?"

He turned to look quizzically at me. "So far? It's done!"

"No, you haven't finished coloring the rest of the sky in."

"The rest of it? It's done!" he insisted.

I looked again. It was a one-dimensional picture, quite good for a little boy, with a crooked brown house, lollipop trees and lines that implied a parked car in the driveway. Behind the house's drapes, there was a glimpse of smiling stick people. In the space above the loopy chimney smoke, three black m-shaped birds flew, and, along the top border of the paper, a thick blue

line a half-inch thick indicated the sky.

"The sky is up," he explained. "That's where I put it."

"That's true," I said carefully, wondering if the subject was worthy enough to pursue, "but the sky doesn't end there."

"Then where does the sky end?"

"It doesn't really. It extends down to the house, grass and trees."

He was becoming defensive. He turned away. "It does not. The sky is up."

"Yes, the sky is up. But it's everywhere too."

"If it was everywhere, that's all you'd see. You wouldn't be able to see me or the house or the grass."

"That's because you can see through it. It's like it's invisible."

"Then you wouldn't be able to see it at all!" he yelled triumphantly. "But I can see it!" His face glowed. "It's blue."

"Not always," I said, my patience gone. I took his hand, dragged him to the kitchen, grabbed our coats and pulled him outside. Night was approaching, and the sunset's pastels bathed the sky.

I pointed. "See. When you look at the sky, it's not just 'up.' You can see it all the way down to the tops of the trees. It extends to the horizon. And it's not blue."

"It's after supper now. In my picture, it's noon, when the sky is blue and up. So I'm right."

"Can't you understand?" I cried, exasperated. "Don't you see? Sky is not a straight line at the top of the world- it's everywhere! It's between you and me, but you can't see it! And after it's blue, way out there, it turns black and becomes space! It never ends!"

Brian wisely decided not to press on. His solemn round face just blinked up at mine in wonder. "It's cold," he said to me in a little voice. "Can we go in now?"

"But do you believe me, do you see now?" I said, calming my temper.

He nodded in the growing darkness. I barely saw his head move. But I heard him say, "Yes, I see. The sky doesn't end."

"Good. Let's go in. I'm sorry for blowing up at you that way."

We went in. To drive home my point, I looked up Finland in World Book and showed him a landscape scene. The blue sky was cloudless and everywhere.

But even as I watched him finish his picture with the blue Crayola, I knew that he really didn't understand.