

***Taking Care of Terrific* by Lois Lowry**

I threw down the book I'd been trying to read, stared out of my bedroom window for a while at the tops of the trees, sighed, and picked up my sketch pad. I doodled a few designs: leaves and stems curling around each other, intertwined. Carefully I colored in the leaves with a green marking pen, leaving some white spots for highlights, so that they looked glossy and radiant.

Maybe, I thought glumly, I'd feel better if someone sprinkled me with fertilizer. Plants do.

Once I bought a dumb little jade plant at a street fair. It really needed somebody; it looked crummy and neglected, like an orphan who's never been taken to the zoo.

I gave it to my mother on her birthday, and she took over with her little tweezers and tweekers and her bottles of plant food, talking to it: "There, now. This will make you perk up," and eureka, it perked up. Grew. Flourished.

Probably my mother talked like that to me when I was little. She hasn't for a long time, though. My parents chose the Carstairs School because in the catalogue it said, "We encourage independence." (It also said, "We charge fifty-two hundred dollars a year tuition for day students, plus lab fees and books, and our graduates get into the best Ivy League college"; but the thing that hooked my parents was the "We encourage independence.")

Murmuring "There now, this will perk you up" to a fourteen-year-old girl probably does not encourage independence. So that is why my mother says that only to small droopy plants suffering from aphids or root rot. To me, when I look, feel, and am droopy, discouraged, depressed, and practically about to throw myself out of my bedroom window because nothing in my life seems to go the way I want it to, my mother says, "Enid, for heaven's sake, you have to learn to solve your own problems. And it might be a start if you would do something about your *hair*."

Sometimes I wish I were a philodendron.

If I were a philodendron, I would not be sitting here, a prisoner in my own bedroom, thinking about what happened this summer, scared stiff and super miserable.