



Source: Martin Chulov, 'Light Horse charges again', *The Australian online*, 01/11/07.

Tags: [sibling rivalry](#), [plants](#), [travel](#)
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'I'm going to Space.' said the girl.

'Oh. But how will you get there?' asked the boy.

'On my bicycle.' she replied.

'Can I come too?'

'Do you have a bicycle?'

'No.'

'Well, you'll have to stay here. You can watch me if you like, but after a while you won't be able to see me.'

'Oh, okay. Hey, hey wait!'

'What?'

'What will you eat?'

'I have a sandwich and some cordial.'

'Okay. See you later.' said the boy.

'Bye.' said the girl.

The bike started out slowly, dribbling, and wavering from side-to-side. It made a route along the line of fresh clover that had sprouted up between the pavements, leaving small trails of squashed greenery behind it. The juice from the clover covered the wheels and made them moist and fresh, and the rubber shined deep black as it hit the sunlight. The pedals were working beautifully, spinning in small even circles; and the handlebars were true, keeping a steady course and obeying the commands of the rider. As she left her street the wind picked up, and blew handfuls of sand and dirt through the air. By the time the bike past Mrs Jenkins' house the wheels were mottled with grit.

'Where are you off to dear?' asked Mrs Jenkins.

'Space.' said the girl.

Mrs Jenkins smiled. 'Well you be careful.'

'I will.'

'Good girl.'

Last night it had rained, and webs of silver snail-trails sprawled across the pavement. A snail that hadn't yet disappeared, to wherever it was that snails disappeared to, narrowly missed being squashed by the bike's great foot.

The terrain began to change. Faster and faster spun the wheels; lighter and lighter felt the pedals. They were flying and falling, fathoms of air whooshing through the spokes and brushing against the edges of the handlebars, which the girl squeezed tighter and tighter. And then, too quickly, the hill was over. The wheels slowed down, the pressure on the pedals increased and once again the girl produced steady even circles. Together they passed swing-sets and trees and birds. Numbers, umbrellas, and pot-plants on balconies. They hurried past street signs: 'Johnson St.', 'No Stopping', 'To the Swimming Pool'. The bike and the girl left the neighbourhood behind.

Now the terrain was large and open: the buildings grew taller, and the trees shrank and then disappeared altogether. The cars travelled faster. The girl's legs were

tired, she concentrated on the road—she didn't want to hit anything. The sound of the suburbs gradually hushed, dropped to a gurgle in the background, and then fell away all together. Now there was just the gentle rushing of cars that occasionally passed by.

They stopped outside the old nursery. She wasn't supposed to travel this far. The girl remembered what it was like when it still had plants. She had favoured flowers back then—she hadn't understood the point of shrubs. The windows were either empty or dirty or broken. Some of the shrubs had been left behind, presumed dead, but since being left to their own devices had blossomed. The girl sat down on a patch of pebbles close to a leggy looking conifer, and took out her lunch. The bike rested against the wall and near a dirty window. She had made herself a tuna sandwich with mayonnaise and lettuce. The bread was a bit soggy. She took small sips from her green drink bottle filled with orange cordial.

After she finished her meal and felt revived, she took up her bike and walked it out of the nursery. On the road again the bike made great progress, it had really come into its own, now that they were closer to Space; they could both feel it. The girl didn't notice any of her surroundings now; all she could see was her destination. As they rounded the golf course the girl's heart beat faster. They had arrived.

Nobody played at the golf course much. She left her bike, pushed her way through the fence and started walking. Because nobody used it, the grass was almost long. The girl walked to the same sand bunker she always used, stepped down into it, and laid on her back. All she could see was Space. She took long deep breaths. Her eyes travelled past the birds, through the clouds, and pierced the atmosphere; they settled on stars, they made giant leaps from one planet to another, and then back again. She saw the whole of Space as if it were made of colour: white, light blue, indigo, orange and red, lots of red. Space was never empty.

It was getting late. The girl knew this because it was getting dark. Before she left the sand, she closed her eyes and held them that way for a minute.

On her way back to her bike she saw a red dot in the grass. She bent down for a closer look. She picked up the marble and smiled at it. It didn't surprise her that there should be a marble in the middle of a golf course; everyone knows that you find marbles in places you don't expect to. She didn't make any stops on the way home, and by the time the girl reached her street almost every part of her ached. It was always like this after a trip to Space.

She stood outside of the boy's door and shouted for him to come out. This seemed to be the simplest way of communicating.

'Hey. Are you in there?' she yelled.

He took a very long time. Finally he appeared.

'You're back. How was it?'

'Good. I brought this.' she said, holding the red marble in front of her.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Kathryn Ryan.