I remember how much I wanted a 10-speed bicycle. That's the only reason I agreed to spend the days of that summer as a paid companion to an old woman named Lilith Adams.

The woman's daughter was a friend of my mother's. But I hardly knew her. And how I dreaded going to Lilith Adam's house that first day.

Mrs. Adams.

Mrs. Adams.

Mrs. Adams.

[CAT MEOWS]

[CAT HISSES]

Mrs. Adams. Mrs. Adams.

Oh, that Lord Jim, he's all show.

Lord Jim?

Lord Jim, this is Ellen. Ellen will be here with us for the rest of the summer.

Now pet him. He understands.

[CAT PURRS]

I hope we can get along for 10 weeks.

I hope so too.

I wasn't very nice to her at first. But I couldn't stand the idea of spending my whole summer with ancient Lilith Adams.

I didn't know what to say to her with her wrinkled skin, her bony, silver hair, and her scratchy old woman's voice.

Ellen.

May I go home now?
Is it 5:00?

Yes.

You may go.

I was back the next morning, earning my money, finding out that Lilith had a set time for everything, at 10:00 water the plants, at 10:30, tidy up the house, at 11:30, start lunch.

I might as well have been in school. But I waged a secret war against Lilith by popping my bubble gum and cracking my knuckles.

I wish I had my bike. It'd only take me five minutes to get here.

Don't crack your knuckles. Where is your bicycle?

I'm getting it at the end of August.

Oh, that's interesting. I'm getting new screens in August, aluminium. A present?

The screens?

No, the bicycle. Is it a present?

A present to myself, I'm earning the money.

Oh, I'm getting my screens at Fullerton Lumber, a present to myself. I earn money too, you know. I'm not entirely useless.

And I'm perfectly capable of taking care of--

Taking care of what, who?

It's whom, not who. And besides, it's what. Screens are what.

But you said--

Now, I want you to take this to the bank for me after lunch and make a deposit. The woman behind the window will tell you what to do. And mind you, don't lose it.

Thank you. Next. Hi.
The Lilith Summer

Hi.

Lilith forgot to endorse this check. Why don't you take it back so she can sign it?

The check was from my mother made out to Lilith Adams. I knew then mother was paying Lilith to babysit me. And Lilith's daughter Eunice was paying me to take care of the old woman.

[CAT MEOWS]

You forgot to sign it.

I did. Did you look at it?

My mother's paying you to take care of me, to look after me just so you can get a bunch of old screens.

I don't need any old screens. I've already got a house full.

I-- I hate this summer.

Later when I calmed down, I realized that Lilith also had been tricked. We'd both been lied to. Neither of us had a real job.

You needn't come back tomorrow, you know. Screens can wait another year and the bicycle too.

I guess it wasn't your idea. And it certainly wasn't mine.

I would have had a better plan. Why don't you go home. It's almost 5.

It's only 4:30. I mean, what kind of a plan should we make?

Me?

You, me, we.

Whom are we plotting against.

Them, Eunice and my mom, neither one of them told us the truth. And I don't think that's very nice.

It is humiliating. But there are other words for US it, love, concern, thinking that they know best.
Maybe we should take the money and pretend like we don't know. That way, I'll get my bike, and you'll get your screens.

Yes, we can do that.

The truce began the next day.

You know, I wrote the story about a girl detective.

You did? Tell me about it.

Well, it's about this girl detective on an island with the treasure that's supposed to be buried there.

Well, keep right on going, my dear, I promised Mr. Cummings that I'd replace the button on his shirt.

Well, anyways, this girl detective finds clues and solves the mystery and captures the murderer all by herself.

Mm, your story, how interesting.

Why don't you sort the buttons in piles and keep them separate?

What would be the fun? This way I'm always finding something I wasn't expecting.

Your story reminds me of a book. Arthur Conan Doyle was a physician who used to write these detective novels while he was sitting in his office waiting for his patients-- The Hound of the Baskervilles by A. Conan Doyle.

"Mr. Sherlock Holmes, who is usually very late in the morning, save upon those not infrequent occasions when he was--"

"...rapped the door just above the lock with the flat of his foot, and it flew open. Pistol in hand, we all three rushed into the room."

It's past time. You'd better run home. I'll call your mother so that she won't worry.

By all means. Maybe we can solve the mystery.

I'll make it over tonight.
Don't miss the clues. Sometimes they aren't easy to recognize.

After Lilith finished the book, I surprised her by playing the piano. And from then on in the long, boring hour between 4:00 and 5:00, we took turns trying to surprise each other.

But Wednesday afternoons were reserved for three-handed bridge--

That's our trick, Mabelle.

Good.

--with Mabelle and Grace.

I'm sorry, Lilith, but I have the--

Grace was Lilith's best friend.

Is Grace rich?

Grace is old money.

What does that mean?

It means she's always been rich.

Are you old money?

[LAUGHS] Poor, land poor, but you can be rich in other ways.

Has Grace always been your friend?

Well, I've known Grace since she was a girl. At 17, she was everything I wanted to be. But I've had happiness that Grace has never known.

Things have a way of leveling out if you live long enough.

Where are your shoes?

I forgot them.

Of course.
I don't what's wrong with bare feet.

Nasty habit.

Mrs. Parsons? Mrs. Parsons.

Oh, there so many new things here. I'd like some of this gingerbread mix. I'm glad it's back on the shelves. It's my favorite.

Well, I'm so glad we ordered it.

Yep, I always like to make some of that.

Shall we go now?

I guess so.

That Mrs. Parsons is a fine woman, manages that place all by herself since her husband died, fine, fine, woman.

Where are we going now?

Well, I thought maybe we'd go over to that bench and rest a while before going home. Would you like that?

Oh my, it's nice to sit down, isn't it?

It sure is hot. Are we gonna stay here very long?

Not very long.

About the hottest day of the year, I bet.

You wanted it very much, didn't you?

Wanted what?

Don't make me say it for you. We can walk back to the store and tell Mrs. Parsons.

Tell her what?
That we want to return something we didn't pay for.

Will you say it for me?

You'll say it. It will be hard but not too difficult. Shall we go now?

Did you forget something?

Yes, we did forget something, Mrs. Parsons. Ellen wishes to tell you about it.

We-- I mean, I-- I took a pearl ring. I want to give it back. I won't do it again.

Ellen, you may put that back where you found it.

Now, Mrs. Parsons, I would like to buy a ring, a birth stone.

Oh, what month did you have in mind?

June.

June, that would be pearl.

Exactly.

We'll take it.

The ring is yours, Ellen. It's you birthstone.

One afternoon, we went to the nursing home to see Lilith's friend Maddie McDonald.

Why do they call it Twilight Meadow.

Because people think in metaphor. Twilight is the time between sunset and dark.

Oh, not much meadow around here, huh?

No, not much meadow.

May I help you?

I came to see Maddie Donald.
The Lilith Summer

McDonald?

She's out of the infirmary now, I believe.

McDonald-- I can't always keep track of room assignments, high turnover, you know. Oh yes, she's been put in 13 West.

Thank you.

What do you mean by metaphors?

Calling something that it isn't.

But that's lying.

Well, sometimes it's better that way.

You know, your eyes are just like your grandmother Judith's.

Maddie? I'm glad to see you, Maddie. It's Lilith.

Lilith.

I brought you some homemade peanut busters. You better keep them hidden. You're not supposed to have them.

Oh, you've got a new gown, how pretty.

Thorbin brought it to me.

Thorbin?

He comes to see me every day.

Of course he does Maddie. He loves you very much.

Who's that?

That's my Ellen. Ellen takes care of me. And I take care of Ellen.

Is that a car?
Thorbin's coming today to take me home. He promised.

Yes, we'll be going now, Maddie. We'll be back real soon.

Later, Lilith told me that Maddie's husband Thorbin had been dead for 15 years.

Hi, I'm here.

It's break-step day.

Break-step day?

It's a day for sleeping until noon or getting up at 4:00 to watch the sunrise. It's a day, Ellen, for doing what you want to do when you want to do it.

What do we want to do?

We're packing a lunch and paddling up the lake.

[KNOCKING ON DOOR]

Hello, Auntie.

One day, Lilith's niece Gertrude came to visit. Lilith had described her as a great one for order, straightening curtains, moving furniture around, and things like that.

I was just in the neighborhood and I thought I'd pop by and see how you're getting on. Oh dear, you see? I knew you were going to have to have somebody come over and help you.

And how have you been getting along, Aunt Lilith?

I'm fine. Can't you see? I'm perfectly capable of taking care of myself, no matter what you and Eunice think.

Aunt Lilith, you're 77. You can't keep on living here like this. Winter's coming. And Twilight Meadows is a lovely place.

I don't need a lovely place. I need a loving place.

What will people think of us, letting you live here like this? What if something happens?

Something always happens. That's life Gertrude.
You have to be realistic.

I'm going to die right here in my own home at 218 Lake Street.

Well, who is this?

Mabelle Burroughs's girl, Ellen.

Lilith takes care of me.

Has she been listening?

Ellen was reading. Weren't you, Ellen? Ellen here is only what she reads.

Well, I have to make a noon luncheon. We'll talk about this again, Auntie.

Will she be back?

In the winter, maybe.

You know, I'm afraid of faces, grownup faces.

My face too?

Not yours, it's just I don't know where to look when people are looking at me.

You should look at the eyes. The eyes of the nicest part of the face. The eyes are the real person, looking out.

I don't suppose you're frightened of anything anymore.

I'm afraid of being alone-- not being alone, as much as being left along, not being of any use to anybody, not being needed, needing to take, but not being able to give, nobody wanting what I have to give.

I wanted to say many things to her that day. But I didn't know how.

[PHONE RINGS]

[PHONE RINGS]
Lilith.

[PHONE RINGS]

Lilith.

[PHONE RINGS]

Hello?

Ellen.

Yes?

It's Lilith, Ellen. Grace died this morning. You must manage by yourself today.

Oh.

Water the plants. It's garbage day. So set the garbage out. I'll try to get back to the house in the late afternoon.

[PIANO PLAYS]

I'd finished the chores. The house was empty. The day dragged on.

How could Grace have died? I'd seen her just the day before. And she was younger than Lilith.

Aren't we going to the cemetery with the others?

In the morning, we'll be alone then.

This is the only dress I had that fit. It should be black.

That's exactly right. A funeral is a celebration.

It was nice, the service.

I suppose so.

Is it hard to die?

No, it's hard to live.
The Lilith Summer

Lilith, were you ever sorry you did something? I mean, if you could change thing, would you do them different?

I wouldn't change the big things. I would the little. I'd throw out the clocks, kick off my shoes, and I'd even forget who and whom.

Summer was over. I had my bicycle.

See my bike?

Yes, I do.

Isn't it the most beautiful thing in the world?

The most beautiful. Mother told me to bring it over and to show it to you and-- and to say goodbye.

The flies are simply awful this year. You're moving to a new city.

Yes.

And a new school, It'll be different and exciting.

I'll ride my bike to school every day.

I don't know how to say goodbye.

Goodbyes are silly anyway, don't mean a thing.

I guess not.

Something gone, autumn near, winter soon.

The summer went sort of fast, didn't it?

Yes, yes it did, Ellen, for both of us.

Funny, at first, I thought it's never end.

No good looking ahead, just relax and let it wash over you.
I learned a lot.

You did?

I know what a metaphor is.

Then the summer wasn't wasted.

I haven't even studied them in school yet.

Well, think of how far ahead you'll be.

I'll write you when I get to Minneapolis.

You do that.

I tried to think of more words but I'd run out of things to say.

Goodbye, Lord Jim, I'm going to miss you something awful, thanks for the summer.

Goodbye, Ellen.

During my first year in college, I received a letter from my mother. Inside was a newspaper clipping. It said simply that Lilith E Adams, 84, had passed away at her home at 218 Lake Street.

I remember that one day I asked Lilith what the E in her name stood for. She replied--

Everlasting, Ellen, everlasting.