It began as the worst summer of my life. The evening before the first day of summer vacation, my mother broke the bad news to me. I was in the kitchen washing dishes and dreaming about the wonderful things my friends and I would be doing for two whole months—practicing for the annual double-dutch contest, which we would definitely win: going to the roller skating rink, the swimming pool, the beach; and sleeping as late in the morning as I wanted to.

“Tasha,” my ma broke into my happy thoughts, “your father and I decided that you’re old enough now to take on certain responsibilities.”

My heart came to a sudden halt. “Responsibilities?”

“Yes. You do know what the word means, don’t you?”

I nodded, watching her dice an onion into small, perfect pieces.

“You’re thirteen going on fourteen and your father and I decided that you’re old enough to watch Junior this summer, because I’m going to start working again.”

“Oh, no! I broke the dish with a crash. “Not that, Mama.” Junior is my seven-year-old brother and has been following me like a tail ever since he learned how to walk. And to make matters worse, there are no kids Junior’s age on our block. Everyone is either older or younger than he is.