

# Adrian Fogelin

An illustration of a hand in a light peach color, wearing a gold ring on the ring finger. The hand is holding a thin blue string that loops around and then extends downwards as a thin vertical line.

SISTER SPIDER  
KNOWS  
ALL

A circular badge with a green gradient and a white border, containing text.

author of  
CROSSING  
JORDAN

SISTER SPIDER  
KNOWS ALL



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Adrian Fogelin



Published by  
PEACHTREE PUBLISHERS, LTD.  
1700 Chattahoochee Avenue  
Atlanta, Georgia 30318-2112

*www.peachtree-online.com*

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First trade paperback edition published May 2007

Cover design by Loraine M. Joyner  
Book design by Melanie M. McMahon

Manufactured in the United States of America  
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 (hardcover)  
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 (trade paperback)

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Fogelin, Adrian.

Sister Spider Knows All / written by Adrian Fogelin.-- 1st ed.

p. cm.

Summary: Twelve-year-old Rox and her grandmother Mimi sell at a flea market every weekend to supplement the family's only income, that of construction worker and college student, cousin John Martin.

ISBN 13: 978-1-56145-386-3 (trade paperback)

[1. Flea markets--Fiction. 2. Grandmothers--Fiction. 3. Cousins--Fiction. 4. Poor--Fiction. 5. Family life--Fiction.] I. Title.

PZ7.F72635 So 2003

[Fic]

2003004875

*Visit the author's website at  
[www.adrianfogelin.com](http://www.adrianfogelin.com)*

For my daughter, Josie, and her fiancé, Marco,  
who came halfway around the world to find her.

*Buona fortuna!*

Special thanks to my editor, Vicky Holifield,  
who always finds the good.

Thanks as always to my buddies, the Wednesday Night Writers.



# Table of Contents

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| 1. The Show . . . . .                     | 1   |
| 2. Spitting Lessons. . . . .              | 11  |
| 3. Selling the <i>Titanic</i> . . . . .   | 21  |
| 4. The Smile Mile . . . . .               | 30  |
| 5. Waiting for a Star to Fall . . . . .   | 39  |
| 6. The Cool Test . . . . .                | 51  |
| 7. Sister Spider Knows All . . . . .      | 57  |
| 8. Something Waiting in the Dark. . . . . | 64  |
| 9. Ellie. . . . .                         | 73  |
| 10. The Absolute Cutest . . . . .         | 84  |
| 11. The Wizard of Menlo Park . . . . .    | 88  |
| 12. Girls' Night Out . . . . .            | 95  |
| 13. The Smell of Trouble. . . . .         | 99  |
| 14. One Pink Sneaker . . . . .            | 109 |
| 15. Six Men in a Sailboat . . . . .       | 116 |
| 16. What Popularity Feels Like . . . . .  | 127 |
| 17. Local History. . . . .                | 132 |
| 18. The Great Disappearing Mimi. . . . .  | 141 |
| 19. Whales at the Y . . . . .             | 148 |
| 20. Return of the Dragon . . . . .        | 152 |
| 21. Someplace I've Never Seen . . . . .   | 158 |
| 22. Big Fat Happy Endings . . . . .       | 164 |
| 23. Old Dead Guys . . . . .               | 170 |
| 24. What If? . . . . .                    | 175 |
| 25. J. B. . . . .                         | 193 |
| 26. The Show Goes On. . . . .             | 206 |





# Sister Spider Knows All

# Chapter 1

## The Show

**D**on't strain nothin'," Mimi warned, watching me duckwalk a basket of grapes back to the tailgate of the truck. "Remember, Rox, you're a girl."

"Only two more, Mimi," I said, handing the basket down to John Martin.

Mimi and I sell grapes at the flea market this time of year—deep purple muscadines and scuppernongs with pearly skins like big gold bath beads.

I'm not being disrespectful calling my grandmother Mimi. Her Christian name is Marilyn. I made up "Mimi" when I was learning to talk. Calling her that may sound lame, especially for a twelve year old, but it's a little late to change.

"You be careful too, John Martin," she fussed at my cousin, bracing her heavy forearms against the arms of the wheelchair and leaning forward. "Backs are funny things."

"I got it, Ma," he said. To my twenty-three-year-old cousin, Mimi's always been Ma—even though she's really his aunt.

It's complicated. His mother died and Mimi raised him.

My mother disappeared. About all I know is that her name is Helen. If I ask questions about her, Mimi always says, Tell you sometime. Sometime when? I ask. I'll let you know, she answers.

Mimi says our family may not be a greeting card, but the three of us together—John Martin, her, and me—are family enough for anyone.

## Sister Spider Knows All

“I swear,” Mimi grumped as I swung the last basket of grapes into my cousin’s arms, “between the picking and lifting, grapes are too dangd much work.”

My cousin winked at me. “We do the picking and lifting,” he whispered. “All she does is complain.”

“Complaining’s her job,” I whispered back.

“And she sure is good at it.”

I nudged a bucket of zinnias toward the tailgate with the toe of my sneaker. Water sloshed. The legs of my overalls were already soaked. John Martin and I had cut the flowers before the sun came up and burned the dew off. A pretty nice job if you don’t mind getting up at five.

The last thing John Martin unloaded was me—which was probably more hazardous for his back than moving a whole truckload of grapes. He grabbed me by the waist and hefted me off the tailgate. “You study today,” he said as he plopped me down. “Don’t tell me you forgot. I put your books over there.”

“Okay, okay,” I said, as the huge hand on the back of my neck swiveled my head toward the books piled under our table. “I see. I’ll get around to it.” The hand squeezed my neck. “Ow, that hurts,” I said. Even though it didn’t.

“Cut it out, you big old bear,” Mimi scolded. “You don’t know your own strength.”

John Martin pushed the bill of his baseball cap up with his thumb, so I could see his eyes. “I mean it now, Rox. Don’t rile the big old bear. Do your homework.” He tugged the hat down again, ambled over to the truck, and climbed in.

I was walking toward our table under the roof of the open shed when he tapped the horn. “Start before the crowd gets here, okay?” And he turned on the ignition.

Leaving a blue cloud, John Martin headed for his construction job, his textbooks wedged behind the seat. He studies on his lunch break and any other chance he gets. Ever since Grandpa Bill died he’s

had to work to help Mimi cover the bills. Taking two courses a semester at Tallahassee Community College, he won't set any records, but he'll make it. He's what teachers call an achiever.

Not me. I hate school. I'm no good at it, except for maybe English. Luckily, it would be hours and hours before the truck came back to fetch us, plenty of time to do homework later.

I took a scuppernong off the top of one of the baskets and bit down. *Pop* went the thick skin, and the rest of the grape jetted into my mouth.

"And grapes are too much work to eat," Mimi commented, as she dug for cigarettes in her big black purse. "Especially with dentures."

Grabbing one of the poles that held up the roof, I swung way out and spit the seeds a good six feet. "Well, I like them." I wiped my mouth with the back of my hand. "My mom liked them too, didn't she?"

*Click*, Mimi flipped the top of her lighter, lit a Marlboro, and took a deep drag. Her words came out with smoke signals. "Tell you sometime."

"When sometime?"

"I'll let you know." And then she changed the subject. "What's the magic number today?"

I took a quick look at my hand. "Eighty-seven eleven," I said, reading the number I'd written there. That was how much we needed to pay the electric bill due Tuesday. Property taxes were coming up soon, plus insurance for the truck, but I'd mark those numbers on my hand on other days.

"Eight-seven-one-one," said Mimi. "Let's get to work."

I took a folded sheet off the top of one of the baskets. As I shook it out, the wind caught it. I felt like it might lift me right off the concrete slab and sail me up and up...over the tin roofs, over the vendors' pickups and vans.

Mimi slapped the sheet down on the plywood table and held it until I set a basket of grapes on each end. She reached out and ran a

## Sister Spider Knows All

hand over the bright yarns of my sweater. The soft, old skin of her face crumpled in a smile. “Glad you like the sweater, Rox.”

I slung an arm around her neck. “I like it big time.” She had crocheted my sweater using leftover yarns from the afghans she sells. Like the afghans, it was made of stitched-together granny squares—a blanket with sleeves.

Across the center aisle and two booths down, tiny Mrs. Yu was unloading inventory from the trunk of her ancient Cadillac. “Your cheatin’ heart, will tell on you...” she sang along with the radio.

I waved. “Morning, Mrs. Yu.”

“Good morning, Rox.” She lifted a lacy party dress to the overhead rack with a hook. Stiff and starchy with layer upon layer of petticoats, the dresses she sells would scratch the life out of you if you had to wear one. But walk under the rack and look up, and the dresses bloom like flowers.

Mimi took one last drag on her cigarette. “Time to tour the Show.” The Show is what she calls the flea market. A big part of her workday is spent buzzing around in her chair, catching up on the latest gossip. She dropped and crushed the butt, then tried to start the wheelchair. But it sat there, dead. “Piece of junk!” she muttered, fiddling with the controls. She bought the chair from Micky Green, a few booths down. John Martin pitched a fit when he came to pick us up that day and found her sitting in it. He said even though it was hard for her to walk, she shouldn’t give up. She told him she hoped he had arthritis when he got old so he’d appreciate all she suffered.

I don’t mind the wheelchair. Without it she’d sit at the booth all day. With it she can go—at least when the chair works.

“Shoot, shoot, shoot!” she yelled, smacking the controls.

“Need help with that, Miss Marilyn?” Danny, our neighbor across the aisle, hitched up his jeans and strolled over. He fiddled a little with the wheelchair too. “There you go,” he said as the motor buzzed. And with a lurch, Mimi was off.

I began heaping grapes in individual baskets, putting a few extra-pretty ones on top to make a customer stop—and reach for a wallet.

The junk came next. During the week people drop it by the house. We sell what we can and take half of whatever we can get. They think because it's a flea market folks will buy anything.

And they will, but only if you arrange the stuff so it looks pretty, not junky. In two years of selling I've learned that everything is valuable in some way. Finding the good and featuring it is my specialty. I don't hide the bad parts—that would be cheating—but I don't point them out. I let the bad parts speak for themselves.

Sometimes finding the good is hard. That's because there is junk and there is Junk. Most of what I had to work with today was little-*j* junk, like a collection of empty perfume bottles, McDonald's Happy Meal prizes, a box of costume jewelry, half a dozen vintage Barbies. "Vintage" means the dolls have ratty hair and their shoes are missing. Some vendors would give up and dump the whole mess in a heap and let the customers paw through it. Not me. Since their shoes were missing, I posed the Barbies in a beach scene. Hamburglar and Grimace joined them on a washcloth beach towel.

I unpacked cartons of cookware and kitchen accessories, T-shirts and cowboy boots, general bric-a-brac, and the world's ugliest beer stein. I arranged them, then walked around the front of the table to check the effect.

"Lookin' good, Rox! Wanna see what you can do with used tires?" Danny dropped a couple of tires off the back of his truck. Danny's not a big guy, like John Martin, but he is *seriously* built, and knows it. He wears T-shirts with the sleeves torn off. Women stop all the time, pretending they want tires. "Tires my foot," says Mimi. "They want his body."

"Got donuts in the cab," Danny said as he manhandled a couple of Uniroyals. "Go ahead, Rox. Help yourself."

Danny Swain, The Tire King, said the black letters on the truck door. It opened without a sound on oiled hinges to reveal a Krispy Kreme box on the driver's seat. When I lifted the lid, a dozen glazed donuts gleamed up at me. I picked the best one and held it close to my nose, but all I could smell was rubber.

## Sister Spider Knows All

Smell-wise it would be better if we set up near the jewelry people or the incense sellers, but I like being close to Danny. He tries to help me figure out math. He fixes Mimi's chair. He always brings donuts. And those are just *some* of the good things about Danny Swain. Finding the good applies to people too.

A truck rattled up. The Gonzalez boys, Juan and Marco, were asleep in back, wrapped in blankets and curled around baskets and cartons of fruits and vegetables.

Mr. Gonzalez backed the truck until his tires bucked the edge of the concrete slab. The jolt woke Juan up. He stood, his quilt around him.

"Hey, Superman!" I shouted.

"Hey, Rox-in-socks!" He smiled sleepily, yawned, then poked his brother with his toes. A second mop of shiny black hair popped up.

Mr. Gonzalez climbed down from the truck cab. Stiff after the long drive up from Lake Okeechobee, he strutted in his tall-heeled cowboy boots like a banty rooster. When he reached the back of the pickup and spread his arms, Marco jumped.

"Hey, amigos," Danny yelled, "donuts!" Marco leaped out of his father's arms and raced his brother to Danny's truck.

Mrs. Gonzalez rolled out of the truck cab last, her bright print skirt billowing. Mrs. Gonzalez is fat, but nice-fat, like a stuffed chair. In her arms was the newest Gonzalez, Rosa—just a nub of black hair sticking out of a blanket. Rosa is the same age I was when my mother left. Three months. Mrs. Gonzalez never sets Rosa down.



I Magic-Marked my signs. The one for the empty perfume bottles said Collectibles. Like "vintage," it's a fancy word for junk. I sat on my stool and ate my donut while I waited for customers. My feet rested on the stack of schoolbooks. I purposely didn't look at them. It wasn't like the kids in my class were studying. They were probably still lazing around in their pajamas. What's the big deal about school,



anyway? The only reason to go is to get a job, and I already have one.

Too bad John Martin disagrees. According to him, school is my real job. He says in the long run school is the only thing that gets a person up off the bottom.

Mimi insists that we're miles above the bottom; you're at the bottom when you live in a cardboard box. We own twenty-two acres and a house free and clear.

But if we *are* up off the bottom—and I'm not one hundred percent sure we are—it's because of the money we make on weekends. Mimi couldn't do the flea market without me. She would never get here. I bring her coffee, which she drinks before opening her eyes. Two cups later she groans, then dresses. I redo her buttons and hand her lipstick. By then she's alive enough to fix her hair, which I spray until it's crunchy and weather-resistant. "I don't know why I even bother with the Show," she complains as I stuff her feet in her shoes.

But I know why. She bothers because we need the money. And she bothers because, since we quit going to church, every friend she has in the world runs a booth at the Tallahassee flea market.

I have friends here too. Lots of friends. And it's never boring. Sooner or later you see everything at the Show. *Everything*. It's the world's best parade.



"Cock-a-poops," said Mimi, smacking into the leg of the table with one wheel. "Right next to Marie. Cutest little things you ever seen." She was back from her round of visits. In her lap were two jumbo cans of stew, and a smaller one with no label from the mystery bin at the Dent & Ding booth. "Go on, Rox," she urged, stashing the cans under our table. "Take a puppy break. I'll watch things here."

"I don't know... There are lots of shoppers." While she was away I had sold four baskets of grapes plus a perfume bottle shaped like a treasure chest. "All right, but I'll be right back," I told her. "Don't go anywhere, okay?"

## Sister Spider Knows All

“Pups-of-the-week!” I shouted, swooping in on Charles’s booth. I plunged a hand into a jar of Libertys. The red, white, and blue marbles squirmed away from my fingers. Even in the hottest weather the marbles in the jars on Charles’s stand are slippery-cool, like fish. Today they were icy. I pulled my hand out and skipped backwards a couple of steps. “Ya coming?”

“Can’t. My dad’d kill me.” He topped off a jar of yellow and green John Deeres, then flicked his hair out of his eyes. Charles has the strangest haircut, long in the front, short everywhere else.

“Come *on*, Charles, you know you want to!” Charles is thirteen, but he’s in seventh too. He stayed back. He’s quitting school when he turns fourteen, then he’ll have his own stand. He says at fourteen it’s legal to drop out. If I thought I’d live to see fifteen, I’d quit at fourteen too. But I wouldn’t. John Martin would see to that. “Well, I’m going.”

“Hold up.” He leaned over the counter and looked as far as he could down the long row of tables. “You see him?” he asked. When I shook my head, he dug the wad of bills out of the cash box and shoved it in his pocket. “Let’s go.”

Hoping Charles wouldn’t notice, I slowed down so he could keep up. His right foot turns in like it’s on the wrong leg. His right hand is funny too, small and shriveled. He looks better behind the table. Sometimes, surrounded by all those shiny marbles, he looks almost handsome, in a Charles kind of way.

Too bad his mom cuts his hair.

“You working on Edison yet?” he asked, pushing his hair back out of his eyes.

“Trying to,” I said. “But my cousin’s too busy to drive me to the library and my grandma won’t make him. We have this old encyclopedia that has a whopping page and a half about Edison in it. She says I should write the report out of that.”

“Could I borrow it sometime?” I guess he was having trouble getting his hands on five sources too. Flunking stuff wasn’t always our fault.



I never said I was their daughter. I just stood close to the couple that was cooing at the fuzzy, wriggling pile of puppies and whined, “Can I hold one, please?” The woman with the pups-of-the-week called me “Sugar,” then frowned when the couple walked away. Too late. By then I had a puppy in my arms.

“Oh, Bobby,” I said to Charles. “Mom’ll just love this one.”

“She might even want two,” he said, playing along. “One for me and one for you, Cindy.” The woman went back to smiling.

Mimi’s friend, Spice Marie, who was selling a bottle of onion flakes at the next booth, looked like she was going to bust if she didn’t laugh out loud. Spice Marie is a regular, like us. She knew we weren’t Bobby and Cindy. She also knew there wasn’t a chance in the world of either one of us taking a pup home.

Charles buried his face in puppy fur. He’d die if someone from school saw him do that, but he knew I wouldn’t get on him about it.

“Hey, Bobby,” I joked, as we walked back. “What’s up with you and those pants?” Shiny and black, they hung low on his butt. “I can see your drawers.”

“You’re *supposed* to,” said Charles, faking a strut. “I’m stylin’.”

One good tug would bring his stylin’ pants down. With anyone else I might’ve done it, but for Charles, being cool is thin as a coat of paint. Why wreck it?

A skinny man waved at us. “Hey, Rox. Hey, Charles!” He was surrounded by china cats, dragons, and Buddhas, all belching smoke.

“Hey, Mr. Finch,” we said together.

The incense seller pulled out a bandanna and blew his nose. The rims of his eyes were pink. Mr. Finch is his own worst advertisement. Mimi’s always telling him he should retire. “Tried that once,” he says. “Couldn’t afford it.” He says the Show helps him buy the little extras, like food and medicine. “By the way,” he called after us. “Your old man’s looking for you, Charles.”

“Uh-oh,” said Charles. “I’m in a world of hurt now.” He made it

## Sister Spider Knows All

sound like a joke, but he hitched up his pants and stumbled back as fast as he could. His dad was at their display, waiting for him.

“I was only gone a mi...minute...” Charles stuttered, pulling his head down like he was trying to disappear into himself. Even though it was kind of my fault he was in trouble, I slipped away into the crowd. Charles would be humiliated if I stuck around, and he’d still catch it from his dad.

Mimi was parked under Mrs. Yu’s dress display, chatting. “I been watching our things from here,” she called.

Everything was exactly where it had been when I went on puppy break. Mimi hadn’t sold a single grape. I stared at the number printed on my hand. Eight-seven-one-one. I slapped on my selling smile and went to work.