

THE  
LOST  
LANGUAGE

CLAUDIA MILLS

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MARGARET FERGUSON BOOKS  
HOLIDAY HOUSE • NEW YORK



The lines spoken in the play are quoted from  
Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* and  
*Through the Looking Glass*.

Margaret Ferguson Books

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Printed and bound in August 2021 at Maple Press, York, PA, USA.

[www.holidayhouse.com](http://www.holidayhouse.com)

First Edition

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Mills, Claudia, author.

Title: The lost language / by Claudia Mills.

Description: First edition. | New York : Holiday House, [2021]

“A Margaret Ferguson Book.” | Audience: Ages 9 to 12.

Audience: Grades 4–6. | Summary: Best friends and sixth-graders

Bumble and Lizard go on a quest to save the severely endangered language,

Guernésiais, partly to impress Bumble's linguist mother.

Identifiers: LCCN 2020043807 | ISBN 9780823450381 (hardcover)

Subjects: CYAC: Best friends—Fiction. | Friendship—Fiction.

Middle schools—Fiction. | Schools—Fiction. | Language and

languages—Fiction. | Family life—Fiction.

Classification: LCC PZ7.M63963 Lp 2021 | DDC [Fic]—dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2020043807>

ISBN: 978-0-8234-5038-1(hardcover)

To Lisa Rowe Fraustino, Susan Campbell Bartoletti, and  
Molly Fisk,  
who helped me rediscover  
the language of poetry

## *Things I've Lost: A Partial List*

Pooh Bear.

I took him on vacation  
and he got left behind in the hotel bed,  
but my dad called and two days later  
a lumpy package arrived in the mail,  
and the lump was Pooh.

My jacket on the bus  
for the class trip to the planetarium.  
Well, I almost lost it,  
but Lizard noticed in the nick of time  
and raced back to our seat  
and grabbed it for me.

My special lucky button,  
when I had a hole in my pants pocket.  
Lizard found that for me, too.

My glasses, in Buddha Delight,  
when my mother had already said  
she couldn't handle One More Thing,  
and I knew that losing my glasses  
would have counted as One More Thing,  
but I told my dad, and he took care of it  
and my mother never had to know,  
so whew for that.

Pencils.

More pencils.

You may have noticed that I got  
everything back again,  
except the pencils,  
but everyone loses pencils,  
and anyway the world is full of pencils.

You also may have noticed that it's always  
other people who get the lost things back for me.

So what would happen if you lost those people?  
Who would help you get them back again?

## *Two Girls Named Elizabeth*

Lizard's name isn't really Lizard.  
(You probably already knew that.)  
But here's the strange thing. My best friend  
and I both have the same name: Elizabeth.  
Only she was Liz, and I was Betsy.

(Here's another strange thing:  
How can *Betsy* be a nickname for *Elizabeth*?)

But when we started being best friends  
in third grade, she said Betsy  
was a dumb name and I should be Liz, too.

So for one week, we were both Liz,  
which made us the *best* best friends ever.

Except that it was confusing.

So she said she'd change her name to Lizard,  
and I'd be the only Liz, but I said,  
in a very small voice, that I'd rather be  
the only Betsy, and she gave a big sigh,  
and said she'd call me B (for Betsy),  
and then it became Bumblebee,  
and then it was just Bumble.

Now we're in sixth grade, and she's Lizard  
to everyone in the world,  
even to her parents and her sisters,

even to teachers who sometimes forget that Lizard  
isn't a name teachers should be calling anyone.

And I'm Bumble to her,  
but not to anyone else.

So when we're together,  
just the two of us,  
we become two girls  
named Lizard and Bumble.



## *What My Mom Thinks of the Name Bumble*

She hates it.

The first time she heard  
Lizard say, “Bye, Bumble!”

my mom said, “*Bumble?*”  
And Lizard said, “That’s her nickname.”

My mom said, “Her nickname is *Betsy*.”  
And Lizard said, “Bumble is *my* nickname for her.”

My mom said, “*Bumble*, as in *blunder*?  
*Bumble*, as in *stumble*? *Bumble*, as in *fumble*?

*Bumble*, as *move in an awkward way*?  
*Bumble*, as *speak in a confused way*?”

My mom knows more about words  
than anybody I know.

“*Bumble* like *bumblebee*,” Lizard said.  
“Bumblebees buzzing around beautiful flowers.”

I could tell my mom wanted to tell Lizard not to call me that,  
but she didn’t want to be mean to my new best friend.

But every time my mom hears Lizard call me Bumble,  
which has been a *lot* of times over the last three years,

I can see her jaw tighten  
with all the things she isn’t saying.

## *Movers and Shakers*

My mother says Lizard  
is a mover and shaker.  
She didn't say,  
but I know she means,  
I'm the one  
who is  
moved and shaken.

## *Like This One Time*

Lizard was at my house,  
sorting little pieces of broken tile  
that my father brought from his workshop  
to glue onto cheap plastic plates  
to turn them into mosaic platters  
for a banquet she and I were going to have.

Not a banquet for lots of people,  
with roasted pheasant and cups of mead,  
like in the book about the Middle Ages  
we had just read together.  
Just a banquet for the two of us,  
with oatmeal raisin cookies and grape juice.

I was picking out some blue and silver  
pieces for mine,  
but Lizard said we should both make ours  
with red and gold.  
So I started to put the blue and silver  
pieces away.

My mother was helping to cover the kitchen table  
with newspaper so we wouldn't get glue on it,  
and she said to Lizard,  
"Why don't *you* make *yours* the way *you* want.  
And *Betsy* can make *hers* the way *she* wants."

“Sure,” Lizard said.

Then she added under her breath,

“If Bumble doesn’t care that no kings and queens  
would ever have *silver* platters if they could have *gold*,  
and red goes with gold better than blue does.”

So I made mine red and gold, too.

And I couldn’t tell if my mother was more mad at Lizard  
for telling me what to do,

or more disappointed in me  
for doing it.

## *Lizard Can Stand Up to Anybody*

Lizard stands up to teachers,  
like when she told Mrs. Henderson  
that Columbus didn't *discover* America  
because America had already been discovered  
thousands of years earlier  
by the people who were already living there  
when Columbus showed up with his ships.

She stands up to bullies,  
like when she saw some bigger boys  
throwing a stone at a bunny  
and told them she was going to report them to the SPCA,  
which she said was the abbreviation for  
the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals,  
and they said, "Yeah, right. Go ahead and report us."  
But they dropped their stones and walked away.

She stood up to Clarence Keaton,  
who sat behind me in third grade and pulled my braids,  
not in a friendly playful way, but hard.  
She told him, "A boy pulled Bumble's braids last year,  
and I told on him, and he ended up going to jail,"  
which was completely not true,  
because we didn't even know each other in second grade.  
And no one would put a second-grade kid  
in jail for pulling someone's hair.  
They'd probably get in-school suspension.  
But Clarence never pulled my braids again.

It is a very useful thing sometimes  
to be best friends  
with the bravest girl in the school.