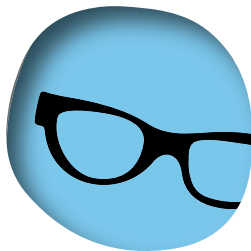
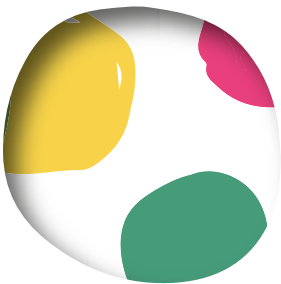


# THROUGH — the — LOOKING GLASSES

*STORIES ABOUT SEEING CLEARLY*



Edited by Nicolette Jones  
*with 35 contributors from around the world including Quentin Blake,  
Ruskin Bond, Gcina Mhlophe and Olive Senior*







# THROUGH — the — LOOKING GLASSES

*STORIES ABOUT SEEING CLEARLY*

*Brought to you by*

·O·O·  
CLEARLY





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## FOREWORD

**JAMES CHEN**

**FOUNDER OF CLEARLY**

Dear reader,

You have a treat in store. When we launched our battle to get glasses to every schoolchild who needs them, little did we realise that it would strike such a chord.

The response has been overwhelming. The world's leading children's authors and illustrators have combined to help us produce this wonderful anthology of stories and drawings about the joy of seeing clearly.

They have done so in support of our Glasses in Classes campaign which fights to get sight tests, affordable glasses and other treatments into every school in the world to give all children the best start in life.

The world is, we hope and pray, emerging from the nightmare of Covid-19 – a period that has brought heartache to so many families and ruin to so many businesses. But our children have also been victims; their education held back as the deadly virus has closed schools for months across the world.

Now it is time for them to catch up on lost time. As we build back better from Covid-19, we need our children to be well educated, ready to take their place in the workforce, facing even greater demands than before.

But as the pandemic fades, another huge problem looms. There are over 300 million children in the world with short sight today; a figure set to grow to 500 million by 2050 if we do nothing. Little wonder that China's president has acknowledged that it is reaching epidemic proportions.





When you pick up a book like this you are taking something for granted – that you will be able to read it.

But that is a pleasure denied to large parts of the global population. The World Health Organisation calculates that there are at least 1 billion people with bad eyesight that could be treated.

Just imagine what it must be like not to be able to read, not to see the board in the classroom, to grow up struggling to focus on the world around you, being unable to drive because it is unsafe, and then having to give up work at an early age because you cannot read the dials on the machines you are working on. It is a fate that has befallen far too many in our allegedly civilised world.

Thankfully, good vision is increasingly on the global agenda. The World Health Organisation has called for governments everywhere to ramp up eye care services for everyone. They say this will help deliver the world's Global Goals – particularly those on good health, quality education, decent growth, eliminating poverty and tackling gender inequality.

In a groundbreaking 2019 report, the World Bank found that kids with poor vision were less likely to attend school and less likely to learn the basics like literacy.

The UN's agencies for education (UNESCO) and children (UNICEF) have said in a joint report that free screening and glasses would help pupils enhance their reading and maths attainment.

The evidence is clear; now is the time for action.

This book, with its contributions from every continent, is a remarkable testimony to the growing support for the cause of better eye health. It brings together this growing issue, which has become the focus of my philanthropy, with the work of my family foundation on early childhood literacy and the importance of developing a lifelong habit of reading. We thank everyone who has stepped up to help.

We thank our editor, Nicolette Jones, for her amazing achievement in pulling so many talents together into one delightful volume.

We hope you enjoy the book. If you do, please spread the word.

You can signify your support by visiting our website: [www.clearly.world](http://www.clearly.world)

Let's get glasses to the 300 million children who need them.

Let's help hundreds of millions of adults, too.

Everyone should be able to see. Clearly.





## INTRODUCTION

# *NICOLETTE JONES*

It was an honour to be asked to assemble an anthology in support of such a cause as the Glasses for Classes campaign. As the children's books reviewer for The Sunday Times in the UK, I think a good deal about the value of reading, not only for the acquisition of information and literacy skills but also for fun, empathy with other people and understanding both ourselves and experiences beyond our own. This global anthology was itself an opportunity to connect with people all over the world in their shared response to the avoidable exclusion of millions of children from all the possibilities of books and education. It was a chance for each of us to do something to create a better world.

The reaction to my requests for contributions astonished me in many ways. The alacrity with which so many distinguished writers and illustrators agreed to help was wonderful, most of them producing original pieces of work especially for this collection. (A couple of authors, already overwhelmed with other obligations, were nevertheless keen to support the campaign and pointed us to suitable extracts from existing books.) Many were in the midst of a lockdown, a circumstance which made focusing on creative work a particular challenge, but 35 authors and illustrators answered the call and gave, for free, their time and talent.

It was not only their willingness that was impressive. The participants were also people of remarkable distinction. In the UK alone, five current or former Children's Laureates joined in, two of whom have knighthoods. Many who offered work have won prestigious prizes and/or created phenomenal bestsellers. From five continents, there were contributors who, as well as being artists and authors of repute, are also eminent



in other fields – in, for instance, science, education, music, comedy, broadcasting, academia, charity, diplomacy and government policy-making. All of them had countless other claims on their time, whether it was home-educating their children or (in one case) working on a vaccine for the coronavirus.

Also amazing was the variety of their responses to the brief: to amplify the theme ‘seeing clearly’. The ideas and the executions were so various – in media as well as meaning. Among the illustrators, Chris Riddell wielded his fantastic drawing pen to make something fantastical: a girl in glasses so transported by reading she is drifting away on her own little rocky planet. Lauren Child used collage, flat colour and quirky characterisation to depict her globally loved creation, Lola, joyously kicking her shoes off to lose herself in a book, toes turned in with excitement. We had a chick’s first sight of its mother – a powerful moment simply, colourfully and graphically expressed by Zhou Xiang; a sweet depiction, in summery paint and skilled line, of a child in a field of flowers taking the time to examine a ladybird (Huang Li); a jokey cartoon of a street scene with a newly-landed alien looking in an optician’s window for glasses for his many eyes (Jon Agee); a child who looks proud of her glasses lovingly portrayed by Randa Haddadin; a humorous

vignette, in line and wash, of an elephant handing out glasses to children who have just taken an eye test (Axel Scheffler); a stylised image of a sprightly elderly rabbit with spectacles from a picturebook about seeing and imagination (Mariana Ruiz Johnson); and Quentin Blake's exuberant pen, offering us lively children contemplating a table full of distinct spectacles, which overflowed onto the cover of this book.

The responses also came in many different literary forms. Some wrote memoirs of their own experience of wearing glasses. UK Children's Laureate Cressida Cowell, writer and illustrator, talked about her difficulties with sight since childhood, and how it has influenced the way she draws and communicates ideas about sight in her stories. By way of example, she shared a detailed and haunting drawing of Hiccup the Viking (from *How to Train Your Dragon*) flying across a giant dragon's eye. British writer, comedian and broadcaster David Baddiel reminisced about the misery of having to wear glasses as a child, and how he has grown into them, offering wise and entertaining advice to youngsters. Canadian Jenny Kay Dupuis remembered a day when she was 12 and how wearing glasses and witnessing a traditional First Nation powwow gave her a sense of belonging. And Olive Senior, from Jamaica and now based in Canada, considered the Rastafarian use of 'seen' to mean 'understood', and how her own experience of glasses and reading enabled her to see not just clearly but deeply.

A story arrived in graphic novel form from Candy Gourlay, based on her memory of being in trouble at school in the Philippines for not looking at the teacher and then discovering the bespectacled superpower of being able to see. Together writer Caroline Dusabe and illustrator Dolph Banza made a picturebook with a vivid Rwandan setting and lyrical text celebrating learning and clear sight.

Some contributions were poems: Kevin Monroe Isaac, High Commissioner to St. Kitts and Nevis, wrote about sunshine and flowers in his mind's eye, and about seeing in white people's gaze their perception of him as different. Nigerian Niyi Osundare gave us a poem about a doctor restoring sight. And Australian Vikki Conley offered lines about the freedom and welcome in a refugee being given a book.

And the fiction ranged from literal to fanciful. Some stayed close to the theme and considered glasses in classes. Geraldine McCaughrean, double winner of the UK's Carnegie Medal, told the tale of an imaginative

child failing at school, who succeeds when her teacher sees past false assumptions and realises that the girl has a problem with her eyes. Gcina Mhlophe from South Africa wrote about the excitement of starting school, and how a boy's experience of the classroom is sabotaged by poor sight, until he is inspired by his name (which means 'Sunflower') to turn towards the light.

Hilary McKay, winner of the Costa Children's Novel Prize, based a story on the experience of her little sister who was incredulous, when she wore her glasses, at what she could see. Meanwhile two more Costa prizewinners gave us magical glasses: Katherine Rundell (Fellow of All Souls College, Oxford) wrote of glasses that see the contents (beautifully imagined) of people's hearts. Frances Hardinge's spectacles showed everyone as they were when they were young children; reminding us that all the ages we have been are still inside us.

There were authors who brought to bear both their scientific expertise and imagination. Manuel Raices Perez-Castañeda, working on a Covid vaccine in Cuba, told us of the history of spectacles and imagined glasses that can see inside the structure of a cell, enable us to combat a virus and help us help each other. And Meshack Asare (from Ghana and now living in Germany) imagined a little girl experiencing sight as other creatures do.

Some approached reading and sight in other ways. Musician David Ouimet wrote a story about a friendship, the joy of reading and how music is also a language we can share. Michael Morpurgo suggested passages from his book *Cool!* in which a boy in a coma visualises those around him and longs to see. UK TV presenter turned writer Dermot O'Leary offered a passage from his stories about Toto the Ninja Cat, who is a blind hero with other kinds of perception - conjured up furrily by illustrator Nick East.

And some treated the theme abstractly and wrote stories about instances of revelation and insight. Indian-born British author Chitra Soundar found a moment when siblings learned to see each other in a more positive light. Argentine Silvia Arazi produced a touching little fable about understanding love. Ruskin Bond wrote a story with a revelatory twist about a blind man in an Indian train carriage. And Nandana Sen's story of a teenage girl's crush ends with new comprehension, exploring, on the way, blinkered perceptions of women and gay men. Sandhya

Prabhat's illustration to Nandana's story showed hands held lovingly – siblings' or lovers', or any helping hands.

I want to thank each of the generous and talented contributors. They all made things of beauty. I am delighted with the range of this anthology, both stylistically and geographically. Collectively, it is compassionate and thoughtful and embraces the world. Its diversity of form and subject offers, I hope, something for everyone to savour – across a span of ages. Caroline Dusabe and Dolph Banza's picturebook and David Ouimet's or Meshack Asare's stories, for instance, might all appeal to those as young as six. While Nandana Sen's or Ruskin Bond's tales or Kevin Monroe Isaac's poem deserve the attention of teens. I hope everyone will find their favourites.

I am grateful to a number of knowledgeable people who kindly offered their expertise and connections to identify and reach contributors in other countries: Jeffrey Canton, children's book columnist of *The Globe and Mail* in Canada; Lisa von Drasek, Curator of the Children's Literature Research Collections at the University of Minnesota; philanthropist Andres Levin in Cuba; Marta and Mercedes Rosso and children's book expert Maria Ines Echegaray in Argentina; Jennifer Gersbeck of the Fred Hollows Foundation in Australia; Mary Jay from the African Books Collective; Grace Lam and the team at the Feng Zi Kai Chinese Children's Picture Book Award and Dr Agnes Binagwaho, Vice Chancellor of UGHE in Rwanda. Also, to Michael Hutchinson for his generosity and Gaby Jones for her fluent Spanish. Thanks to Josie Hailey and Dylan Goveas who have helped make the book come alive, both in print and online. And not least a heartfelt thank you to James Chen and the Clearly team who made everything happen and were a joy to work with: Jo Irwin, Simon Darvill, Ella Wilkinson, Will Straw, Charlotte Todman, Graeme MacKenzie, Philip Webster, Kevin Cahill and Simon Bristow, and to Abigail Sparrow and Philippa Perry who are as indispensable to me as my spectacles. And to my darling family, Nicholas, Rebecca and Laura Clee, all voracious bookworms who look ravishing in glasses.

Most of all, thank you to the readers of this. I hope *Through the Looking Glasses* takes you somewhere unexpected and opens your eyes to new possibilities. And I hope you see a way to help.







**THROUGH**  
**— the —**  
**LOOKING**  
**GLASSES**

**STORIES ABOUT SEEING CLEARLY**



STORY

# MOULDY OLD WORDS

GERALDINE McCAUGHREAN

Miss Binka was not looking forward to the new term. There had been so many of them. Year by year, she taught classes of infants to read and add up, colour in, share and not to bite. Then off they went into the year above – and the next – in the general direction of being grown-ups. But Miss Binka just started again with a new batch of children. She was on a roundabout that never stopped, and she was starting to feel a bit sick. But she pinned her doubts away with seventeen hair pins, put on a dress instead of her summer-holiday trousers and set off for school.

Looking at her new class, she saw Zizi Something, and sighed. Last year, Zizi had been kept down in the Remedial Class because she still could not – would not – learn to read. Zizi was the despair of the staffroom. She never looked at you when you were speaking to her, and she refused point-blank to either write or read. Now, clearly, she was Miss Binka's problem.

Miss Binka took a deep breath.

'Now today, children ... Listen! Fingers on lips now and listen! I want you each to tell me all the things you saw on your way to school this morning.'

One by one, they did: cars and dogs mostly, same as every year.

‘Which just leaves you, Zizi. What about you?’

Unwillingly, the girl stood up, tall and trembling, staring up at the ceiling to help her remember. She nodded her head each time she remembered something. ‘I saw a lion, three peacocks, a hot-air balloon, a troupe of baboons swinging on the telephone wires. There was a man singing at a window – oh and a waterfall ... and an elephant pulled a tree out of a ditch with its trunk.’

Miss Binka was delighted at the thought of the acrobatic baboons ... but wondered if she should say, ‘Well done’, or frown and discourage lying. The other children were already baying for blood:

*‘Don’t believe you!’ ‘She’s lying, Miss!’ ‘She never!’*

‘Zizi,’ said Miss Binka, ‘did you see these things with your eyes, or did you invent them – make them up?’

The girl’s face was bright red, and she had her eyes tight shut. When she finally spoke, the words burst out of her like machine-gun fire. ‘I made them in my head. I make stories in my head. I’m allowed, aren’t I?’

Miss Binka quailed a little from the girl’s loudness. But spying an opportunity, she knew she ought to try. The rest of the class were enthralled (except for the ones trying to pull out each other’s hair).

‘You most certainly *are* allowed, Zizi ... But wouldn’t you like to be able to read other stories – new ones?’

Zizi’s face screwed up, like a blood-soaked tissue. ‘Don’t make me! You mustn’t tempt people! I mustn’t, so I won’t. There was this man once. He was called Tantalus. He stole a golden dog, so when he died he had to stand in a pond up to his chin under an apple tree. But if he tried to drink, the pond emptied. And if he tried to pick an apple, he couldn’t reach it, not ever.’

‘I’m afraid I don’t quite see ...’

‘So, he was always thirsty and always hungry. He wanted, and he couldn’t ever have. That’s me – I mean, I’m the same.’

‘*You stole a dog?*’ said a boy by the window. He was impressed.

‘*No*’ snapped Zizi.

'No, of *course* she didn't,' snapped Miss Binka, hoping that was true. 'Do go on, Zizi. Make us understand what you mean. Tell it like a story, if it's easier, dear.'

Zizi looked at the ceiling. Her tears changed direction and started running down into her ears, which fascinated Class One more than anything she might say.

'We had books in our house. Three books. They belonged to my granny when she was little. She read them to me when I was little, too. I sat on her lap. She read them so often that it got so I could read the words too and the stories. Even after my gran died, I could still read the words. All of them! But that was wrong. I read them too many times! My eyebeams were wearing them out! Every time I opened a book, all the words had turned a bit hairier, 'til they looked like lots of caterpillars crawling along a wall. Or fluff from under the bed. Or camels a long way away in a hot desert – just blurry shapes. It's a punishment because I read Gran's books when she wasn't there. Or I read them too often. And I wore out the words. My eyebeams wore them off the page!

'Gran was dead by then. I knew Ma and Pa would be angry that I'd spoiled the books. So, I hid them where they wouldn't see. But God saw, 'cos when I got to school and saw all the books, I thought "Oh, I can read all these ones!" ... But I couldn't, because soon as I opened one, my eyebeams burned the words into just speckles of soot. They even wore out people's faces!'

The whole of Class One disappeared under their desks, squealing. Only Zizi and Miss Binka remained. 'My eyes wore out all of everything! And then I thought maybe I was being punished for reading books when I should have been cooking and cleaning or making my bed or listening to my grandfather. Or God. God had put holy fire on my eyes, so that I couldn't see anything properly ever again. Now I make up new stories in my head, and I imagine things are there that aren't. It's wicked, I know! And I listen to the things people say on buses and in the shops, and I hide the words in my head – just like I hid the books. And I start to write down stories ... but I can't read them, either, 'cos I'm like Tantalus. I look, and I lean in close, and all the words go out of reach. All the words go ... they go ...' (she let out a howl like a wolf baying at the moon)

**'... m o u l d y!'**

Then she composed herself and sat with her hands in her lap and her head bowed.

A hairgrip pinged out of Miss Binka's hair, and a curl sprang upwards, like an idea, from her head. She jumped up ... set off in one direction, set off in the other. 'Where, where, where ... Wait here, child! No, come with me! No, stay here! Don't move! Yes, do! Come with me!' and she pounced between the desks and took hold of Zizi's arm. Zizi stumbled after her, colliding with the desk and the doorpost as she was hauled out of the classroom. The Year Ones came out from under their desks to watch. In the corridor the two collided with the school dinner lady. 'Look after Class One, Molly, would you? Teach them something.' Then, like a shopper with a wonky shopping trolley, Miss Binka manoeuvred Zizi into the library and sat her down. Zizi wilted, resting her head on the table, arms wrapped round her body as if to make herself as small as possible.

'Zizi! Zizi! I want you to ... oh! Book, book, book ... what was I thinking?' Since they were in a library, it was not hard to find a book. Then she went to the librarian's desk and scoured around for ...

'Whatever are you doing, woman?' demanded the librarian, hearing the ruckus and emerging from behind a bookcase. 'Stop that!' 'This library is not properly equipped!' Miss Binka retorted. 'Get Zizi a cup of tea, will you? She's had a shock. Well, I have anyway. But the girl needs tea.' Another hairpin pinged out of her hair and landed on the photocopier.

Miss Binka crashed back into her classroom where Molly the dinner lady was explaining how 8 chips could be shared between 4 people. The children looked worried, fearing a chip famine was on its way. Molly, startled, left off drawing after the seventh chip. She watched Miss Binka ransack her desk drawers, give a triumphant 'Yes!' and hurry off again, pausing only to say, '7 chips, 4 children — 1.75 chips each. But fractions may be a little hard for them at the moment, Molly. Just tell them how to make cheese straws. Or what not to eat.'

'Zizi. Zizi, dear. See this?' Miss Binka nudged the book between Zizi's forehead and the desk. 'I want you to look at this through this ...'

Zizi recoiled in horror and shook her head. 'It's alright. Honestly! I promise. Cross my heart and hope to die,' said her teacher, crossing her heart with a magnifying glass.

Zizi looked through the magnifying glass. She bent her head lower, then raised it higher. Miss Binka took hold of her hand and moved the magnifying glass up and down until she saw the girl's eyes widen and focus: two flowers opening. 'The words are all still there, Zizi! See? You can look at them and look at them, and they won't shrivel or go mouldy or turn into caterpillars. You're a clever, clever, clever girl who learned to read all by herself. But your eyes played a dirty trick on you. They got lazy. They said, "We can't be bothered. It's too much like hard work." It happens. The muscles behind your eye — the goo inside your eyeball — sometimes they don't quite do things right. Sometimes they aren't strong enough, or they bend things out of shape. Sometimes the two of them are just like a brother and sister that quarrel and stop helping each other out. There are mirrors at the back of your eyes ...'

Zizi looked up – looked her teacher directly in the eye. 'Mirrors?'

'Eyes are amazing ... but really not terribly reliable. That's why I wear glasses, look – because my eyes are getting old and they need help to work properly. What do you see through the magnifying glass, Zizi?'

'No, no, no. What about God ...?'

'Him? All this while, He's probably been waving His arms about, like this, and tearing at His hair like this, and sending albatrosses with messages and writing **Noooooo!** on the sky with bits of cloud, and wiggling the telephone wires hard enough to make the baboons fall off, even ... but you couldn't see any of that ... Tell me what you see through the magnifying glass, Zizi.'

Zizi looked for the longest time.

Finally, she said: 'STORY,' as if, like an explorer in the jungle she had just discovered a jade palace on a golden hill, guarded by turquoise dragons.



The last hairpin sprang out from Miss Binka's head, and her hair tumbled like a waterfall down her back. 'On Saturday I shall take you to an optician (if your parents will let me), and we shall get you some glasses. Then you'll see ten times better than through this silly magnifying glass ... But for now, do please keep it. Keep it anyway! It will remind you of the day you started school – again – and everything got so much better.'



ILLUSTRATION

# *IMPOSSIBLY LIGHT*

CHRIS RIDDELL

This illustration is my attempt to evoke the feeling of losing yourself in a book and being transported by the story to another place in your mind's eye. Drawing floating rocks always makes me feel calm and reflective – something heavy and solid, made impossibly light.





STORY

# SUNFLOWER BOY, LANGA

GCINA MHLOPHE

Every single day little Langa watched his two older sisters getting ready for school. His warm brown eyes followed their every movement. He didn't utter a single word. A faint smile always danced on his lips.

When they rushed out of the door, he followed and stood at the gate, waving them goodbye. Why did they never wake up earlier to do everything on time, to finish their breakfast, to say thank you to their mother before walking nicely out of the door? There'd be no rushing. No running. No struggling to climb the hill before joining their friends on the big tar road to school.

Langa's little mind had so many whys. He did not ask these questions out loud. Always wondering, wondering. How far was the school? How he longed to go ...

At the age of four, children in big cities, towns and townships all over South Africa were going to early learning centres already. Their beautiful, ever-curious minds were being prepared for big school. Not so for Langa and other children in his quiet village. Oh, there was lots to do during the day. Large open spaces to run in and many trees to climb, chickens to feed and tiny yellow chicks to marvel at as they followed mother hen everywhere. The big excitement happened when a hawk flew low in the

sky looking for a chance to grab one of those yellow chicks for his meal. The cock would come running, making so much noise to protect his family. Then Langa's mother would come running out of the house shouting at the scary big bird. Langa didn't know if he was also in danger.

Later he would enjoy throwing sticks for their big black dog Gilingwe to catch and bring back.

Playful barks could be heard as Langa rolled on the grass giggling and squealing, repeatedly calling out, 'Gili, Gili, Gili!' till his grandfather came over to rescue him. By this time Langa would be covered in grass from head to toe.

Soon they saw the girls walking back from school. Gilingwe and Langa bolted out of the gate to meet them. Gili always won of course. His tail was wagging blissfully and his tongue hanging out.

The girls each took Langa by the hand and then swung him up and down, back and forth. How wonderful it was to have loving sisters who could do that! That was one of Langa's favourite moments to look forward to.

Some afternoons, after eating their lunch and helping Mama here and there, the girls sat down to do their schoolwork. When Langa asked to sit with them, they always said yes, as long as he would be quiet and not disturb them. 'But sisi, I never talk or make any noise when you work. I just want to watch and listen.'

His sisters looked at each other and shrugged their shoulders, smiling kindly.

He could hardly understand most of the things they were talking about as they compared answers or reminded each other of what the teacher had said in class.

Langa sat there dreaming of the day he would go to school with them. If their father was still alive, maybe they would have been living in a place much closer to school. Maybe.

Finally, two long years later, Langa was the first to see daybreak. He jumped out of bed and woke everyone up. His mother laughed and held him in a big warm hug.

What a big smile on that boy's face as he put on his brand-new school uniform, ready to join his sisters for the first time. Their mother made sure that they left early. She was worried about her little boy on that long walk.

First they climbed to the top of the hill behind the houses. Then they joined more children walking along the big main road with many loud trucks and fast cars.

A whole hour in the morning sun. That's how long it took them to make it to their school. Often tired and sweaty.

His twin sisters looked at Langa, made sure he looked fine on his first day of school. They had promised their mother to check on him, and to make sure he met his class teacher. They were already in grade four. A very big class!

Langa took to school like a duck to water. He loved every minute of it. Even the long walk to school and back home in the afternoons did not faze him. Nothing brightened his day more than walking into his classroom. He listened hard and his teacher was pleased with him. In his mind he was already imagining the moment he would see his mother and tell her every single thing that happened in class that day. But some children made a lot of noise in the back of the class. They folded rolled up pieces of paper and threw them at the backs of other children's heads. This made it hard for other children to concentrate, but Langa made sure he only focused on the teacher in front of him.

By the time he was in grade three he felt like a big boy. He enjoyed reading his books to his mother and grandfather. He would smile and cover his face with his hands when they praised him.

There were even times when he read his sisters' old books, which he kept safely packed in a box his grandfather had prepared for him.

But strange things began to happen. He was not so close to the front. There were 50 children in his class. It was frustrating always to be rubbing his eyes as they were itchy and often watered. His head hurt.

'Langa is crying Mam.' Some children told the teacher. Miss Zondo turned and asked him what the matter was. Did he have a headache? But Langa simply shook his head and wiped his eyes again.

At home they talked about it, and they decided that maybe it was the long walks in the hot sun. His mother gave him a hat to wear every day. It did help to protect his head from the heat, but his eyes continued to itch, and tears would stream down his cheeks from time to time, for no reason at all. When that happened in class, the letters on the blackboard became blurry. Langa was not happy anymore. Sometimes he wanted to cry out loud and run out of class. All the way back home. But it was so far to walk alone along that dangerous main road. Terrible things happened to children, and it filled his heart with fear.

What could be wrong with his eyes? he wondered sadly.

His class teacher spoke to Langa's big sisters one afternoon.

She gave them a letter requesting his parents to take him to a doctor. In the meantime, the teacher told the class that she would change their sitting places from the following Monday.

Langa felt a little better sitting in front. He was closer to the board.

It was a very nervous boy who went to the medical centre in town that morning. He had not even had his breakfast.

The eye doctor welcomed them warmly. When he saw how very scared Langa was and close to tears, he sat him down and asked a few questions. How old was he? Did he like school?

His voice was gentle. Smiling kindly, he promised Langa that there was no need to worry.

'Am I going to be blind?' whispered Langa to the doctor.

'No Langa, I don't think so. You are just short-sighted.'

'What is short-sighted?' asked his mother, quite concerned.

'It means that he can see things that are closer and not so well when they are far. And you know, many people around the world have this condition. And we can help him.'

The doctor did a few tests. Let him lean his forehead on a special headrest with two glasses for him to look through. He was asked to look at the big letters on the wall. They got smaller and smaller.

He was trying to work out how strong the medicine was that they had to put on his lenses.

And then the doctor shone a little light into his eye. But what made Langa laugh a little was when he blew some surprise puffs of air into each eye. It tickled, and he was not so scared anymore. The doctor laughed with him. They even learnt that children under 12 could have their sight tests and first pair of glasses for free. That was the best news of the day!

On their way home his mother told him how proud she was of him. She told him that maybe the sunflowers could teach him a lot. She had planted them when he turned six years old – almost ready to start school. She said he was named after his great-grandfather, Langa, which means sun in Xhosa. So he was the child of the sun.

‘When you are scared just look at the sun and know that every single day is a new start.’

‘I am scared about what is going to happen to my eyes. But the doctor says I will be fine. Like many children all over the world who struggle with eye conditions. Some are blind. Others are partially sighted, and of course there are even more people who start wearing glasses at a very early age. I know I must be like a flower that looks to the sun. Sunflowers follow it as it rises and travels across the sky every single day.’

At school, their teacher had started writing in big letters on the blackboard. A girl next to Langa smiled shyly and whispered, ‘That’s better. I like it more when she writes in big letters.’ Langa smiled back and said nothing.

On the day he came to school with his brand-new pair of glasses, all the children looked at him with great surprise. Miss Zondo smiled warmly.



Some laughed nervously. Others whispered, 'four eyes.' But Langa was fine. He could see much better with his glasses. And he could read all the books he wanted.

The twins called him Professor Langa. He liked that, a lot!

His grandfather simply said, 'Ah, my sunflower boy, Langa. Your father would have been very proud of you.'



POEM

# ***THE GIFT OF SIGHT***

NIYI OSUNDARE

This poem was originally written about a 15-month-old boy who was born blind, but who had his sight restored after a surgical operation sponsored by members of the Inner Wheel Club, District 913, in Nigeria. Reproduced here with substantial amendments.

What the dark universe of the womb concealed  
The doctor's labour has brought to light ...

Born blind  
In that part of town  
Where the road ran rough  
And streets sizzled like hungry serpents  
He encountered the world with a vacant gaze  
And a voice bold like a midnight bell

Many thought his plight was a curse,  
Some strange penance for a nameless crime  
From a nameless past by nameless forebears  
Others claimed his conception must have happened  
On a starless night besieged by furious fireflies

But the doctor saw it all as a vital challenge  
Pressed modern Science into service  
And opened that door long shut  
By a strange, unnerving affliction

How glorious the Light that day  
When Baby saw Mother for the first time  
And Mother's face was a temple of joy ...

Light everlasting  
To all Givers of Sight and Vision.



STORY

***WHEN ALLY, MY LITTLE  
SISTER, FIRST SAW STARS  
BY PETE***

HILARY McKAY

I was an only child for nearly two years, but I can't remember it. There were four of us in the end, but for a long time, there were only three. Me and Eva and Bess. After the twins a big gap, and then Ally.

Our parents were good parents, and they gave us what they could. All the usual things. A home that was warm in winter and had open doors in springtime. Birthday cake on birthdays. Sometimes even the seaside in summer. They tried to give us good advice too, but in the end they gave up and they said we would have to make our own mistakes, and I promise you, we did.

I made most of mine at school, where I seemed to get caught out more often than the other kids. There were always messages coming home about Peter and his attitude. School is the only place that calls me Peter. The whole of the rest of the world calls me Pete.

While I was making my mistakes at school, the girls were making theirs at home, and at the current time Eva's big mistake was that she, on consecutive weekends, dyed her hair purple with henna, sunflower yellow, black-hole black, and on the fourth Saturday got Bess to cut it all off and took to wearing a hat. Bess, meanwhile, had been dabbling in shoplifting, mostly hair dye towards the end, and got caught.

But none of us made mistakes with Ally. I was nine years old when Ally arrived, and Bess and Eva were seven, and since we didn't have any pets in our family, we turned to Ally and we looked after her instead. We were Team Ally.

From the start, Ally had a thoughtful expression on her face, and she was obviously intelligent. At school she always looked smaller than the others in her class, like a Mark 2 version: better designed and scaled down a bit. Eva and Bess and I also thought she was the prettiest of all of them. She has a very nice face and big dark eyes.

We were never able to teach Ally to catch a ball. That was it. Everything else, we could. As she got older, we invented worlds for her. We invented Arctic Post, when, at Christmas, letters arrived almost every day for Ally. They had beautiful North Pole stamps on their envelopes, and descriptions of bears and reindeer, and recipes involving ice. I got good at painting Northern Lights. We actually used to put those letters in the freezer to give them frosted edges before we left them on the doormat.

Also there was Homing Snail who lived in the garden in a house built from Lego. Homing Snail went out at night but was always home by daylight. Sometimes, I admit, he changed a little. Got bigger or smaller or maybe faded a bit. But he was always there for Ally in the morning. I saw to that. He had a bed and pictures on his wall of other snails doing snail things. Even a tractor in his Lego garage for getting around the garden. On Ally's fifth birthday he decorated his house with daisy chains.

These, and many other things, Team Ally invented for Ally. She invented things for herself as well. Recently, it was homemade chocolate from icing sugar and brown paint. She made a lot of chocolate biscuits from this recipe and, on Bess's advice, left them out in the garden to dry. But they vanished. Grateful pigeons flew off with them, Eva told her.

'Are you sure?' asked Ally.

'Absolutely,' said Eva, who was in the second week of hat-wearing. 'Didn't that happen, Bess?'

Bess, who was in the fourth week of being banned from Superdrug, agreed that it had.

'I can't make anymore,' said Ally, 'because the brown paint is lost.'

'Never mind,' said Bess, who personally had binned the brown paint before Ally poisoned herself and any random biscuit takers. 'You did it once. That's what counts.'

'Is it?'

We assured her it was. There are a lot of things you only have to do once, we explained. I, for instance, will not be spray painting the teachers' full names all over the staff car park anytime soon. And Bess says next time Eva dyes her hair green or something she can nick the dye herself. And Eva says she's not doing it ever again. She's growing it long, and presently she will weave in beads and feathers and other stuff.

'That's a good idea,' said Ally, and we, Team Ally, pounced on this remark because we had been given a job by Mum.

'See if you can get Ally to wear her glasses,' Mum had said, begged actually, because she couldn't and Dad couldn't, and school couldn't either.

No one could.

Poor old Ally. She'd put the glasses on and looked in the mirror and howled.

Ally had said, 'I look ugly.'

She hadn't. She'd just looked like Ally, with glasses on.

This had all happened because an eye test had discovered that although Ally could see things like Homing Snail and the ice crystals on her Arctic Post perfectly well close up, a lot of the rest of the world was a lovely blur, and no wonder she couldn't catch a ball. So she had to wear these glasses, and there they were, sitting on the windowsill, day after day, untouched.

'It would be a good idea,' said Eva now, 'to try your glasses on.'

'They were very expensive,' said Bess.

It's no use pretending that our family has a lot of money, because we don't. We have just about enough if we're careful and Mum and Dad work all the hours they can get, and Eva and Bess don't fuss about second-hand school uniform, and I do my paper round. Which Ally knows as well as the rest of us.

When Bess said about her glasses being expensive, Ally brightened up and asked, 'Couldn't we take them to the shop and get the money back?'

'No,' said Bess, 'because they were made specially for you and wouldn't work for anyone else. And anyway, Granny paid for them.'

'Oh,' said Ally.

One tear.

Granny. When Granny knitted us hats in terrible blue and orange stripes, we wore them. When she made lime green jelly with wooden pineapple cubes embedded in the base, and so rubbery it blunted our spoons, we ate it. And when she turns up on her red moped singing Beatles songs and hugging us all, it's the best thing ever.

So when Ally heard that Granny had paid for her glasses, she knew the game was up.

Out they came, and Ally bravely put them on and blinked a lot and she stared at the kitchen floor and said, 'There's horrible crumbs.' She glanced at the ceiling and saw a crack. She spotted cobwebs where we hadn't noticed cobwebs.

Bess and Eva and I cleaned the kitchen at lightning speed. Ally looked at me and said, 'I didn't know your eyebrows were like that.' She sounded very sad. Later she told me she had seen other things about my face that worried her too. She was also very shocked when she saw the exact state of Eva's hair. (I have to say, she wasn't the only one there.) And, although she didn't mention it, because we had brought her up with manners, the spot on Bess's chin got many unhappy glances.

And so it went on. With Dad's stubble moustache and Mum's wrinkles and the fingerprints round the light switches. Nothing and none of us were as we had seemed, and everything, without exception, was worse.

There was a parents' evening for Bess and Eva after school that day. I was to take care of Ally while Mum and Dad faced the music with the twins. We saw them off, and Ally noticed outdoors for the first time in all its unkind detail, and she said, 'Even the trees have sharp edges.'

Even the trees. Poor Ally, mourning her dappled world.

I said, 'Ally, you'll get used to it,' and Ally said, 'I don't want to,' and I understood because all my life I've been getting used to things I don't want to, and I don't suppose it's finished yet either.

It was November. The light was fading. I was glad. I said to Ally, 'Anyway, it'll be dark soon.'

'Good,' said Ally.

We sat in the kitchen, Ally and me, and waited for the dark.

'What's the worst thing?' I asked Ally, and her answer was terrible. She said, 'All the stuff you told me that wasn't ever true.'

I was shocked. Truly shocked. What stuff?

'You said Eva's hair was all right. That I looked like Mum, and Mum was pretty. I didn't know the kitchen was so awful, and Bess had spots. Or any of the rest. What else isn't true? You're going red.'

I switched off the kitchen light. I thought about the Christmas letters and Homing Snail and the recent affair with the chocolate biscuits.

'It's not fair,' said Ally.

I said, 'No, I suppose it's not.'

'I'm not stupid,' said Ally. 'I guessed a lot.'

'About Homing Snail and things?' I said, although I hated asking.

Ally nodded. 'Sometimes I pretended because I knew you'd tried so hard.'

Oh, Ally.

It took a long time, but dark came at last.



'Dark is dark,' said Ally, and she sounded a little comforted. She opened the door to look at it properly. She said, 'I'm going out in it,' and went.

The street lamps beyond the trees were watery pale, and the buildings were blocks of darkness. The trees had no sharp edges. There were no colours and there was no moon.

There were about ten thousand stars. Maybe more.

I heard Ally make a noise, like she'd stumbled or been suddenly frightened.

But it wasn't that. She was standing quite still. When she moved, she moved carefully like a small animal waiting for the pounce. She said, 'Pete.'

'It's okay,' I said. 'I'm right here.'

'Up there,' said Ally. 'Can't you see?'

Stars.

For a while she became outraged. Like we had deliberately kept stars from her knowledge. She shouted, 'Why didn't you tell me?' as if she'd been cheated.

This wasn't fair, and I told her so, and I mentioned stars on telly, stars in books, stars on birthday cards and Christmas trees, stars everywhere.

Ally stared at the truly stupendously starry sky and said, 'Not like this.'

That's more or less it. How my little sister Ally first saw stars. Later we went into how she knew that Homing Snail couldn't make daisy chains because he hadn't hands, and she also knew Bess and Eva had stolen and eaten the chocolate biscuits because they'd sounded so guilty. Also, she had googled the North Pole and found the stamps were wrong. 'Should have been Lapland stamps,' said Ally.

Later, I discovered, there was still a lot that needed clearing up, and that it would take time

But not tonight.

Ally had seen the moon before, and she asked where it was, and I said it wasn't always there and not always the same shape. She wanted to know why. I told her I couldn't go into the phases of the moon and all that right now.

And that I was freezing to death.

I said we should stick to stars.

There were such a lot of them that night. It was like they'd sparkled themselves up and come out specially for Ally, but I didn't say that, because they hadn't (you learn by your mistakes).

They were gorgeous though.

Ally asked, 'Are they always like this?'

I could hear her snuffling a bit. Maybe crying.

I said, 'No. Not very often, Ally.'

I said, 'They're particularly bright, tonight.'





ILLUSTRATION

# *SEEING A WAY*

QUENTIN BLAKE

I was pleased to be asked to do this drawing, and very pleased that I could see a way of doing it!



Think  
with spectacles  
2020



STORY

# YESTERGHOSTS

FRANCES HARDINGE

‘What would you do with them, anyway?’ Oliver whispered. He was still hoping Kyle might have a change of heart.

‘I dunno.’ Kyle squinted up at the little balcony, where the old man was sipping from his mug, unaware of the two boys hidden in the bushes below. ‘Glue paper eyes to them, maybe. And put them on Churchill’s statue. Look – he’s going inside! Quick! Now!’

Oliver obediently sprinted over to the apartment building. He clambered on top of the wheelie bin, and then jumped to grab hold of the balcony railings and pulled himself up. Yes, old Mr Wetherstone had left his glasses behind again. There they were on the plastic table, next to his book.

As Oliver snatched up the glasses, he saw the old man’s shocked face staring at him through the glass doors. Oliver turned and jumped down from the balcony, feeling sick with panic and something else. He sprinted away from the apartment building, and Kyle fell into step with him as he reached the road. Behind them the balcony doors banged open.

Mr Wetherstone called something, in a high, hopeless voice. A single word. ‘Police?’ Was that it?

No, he realised. The word had been 'please'.

Please don't do this. Please come back.

Oliver's stomach twisted, but it was too late for him to do anything but run.

'He saw me!' gasped Oliver as he and Kyle sprinted side by side.

'Doesn't matter!' Kyle panted without breaking stride. 'Won't have recognised you. Hasn't got his glasses, has he?' He was laughing, Oliver realised.

It never seemed possible to say no to Kyle. It wasn't just that he was bigger than Oliver, he seemed so much more certain about everything. And when he got angry or worked up, the whites showed all around his irises. It made Oliver feel like he was standing in front of an oncoming train. It was better to keep Kyle happy because then you were on the train. You got swept along by it, but at least it didn't hit you.

Summer holidays always brought out the worst in Kyle, and Oliver thought he understood why. School was a grind, but at least it got them all out of the village. During the holidays there was nothing but Barhurst and boredom.

Barhurst was an old village, but it wasn't a pretty, thatched sort of oldness. It was old like blue milk, or a discarded tyre. On one side of it, a dual carriageway rumbled relentlessly. On the other, the railway line muttered then roared, muttered then roared. Families stayed in Barhurst generation after generation, but only because it was hard to sell their houses. Nobody really wanted to live somewhere full of the roar of trains and cars rushing past to somewhere more exciting.

Oliver knew every pothole of Barhurst, every building, every face. The familiarity chafed until it hurt, like a tight shoe rubbing a blister raw.

\*

The two boys stopped on the footbridge over the railway tracks. Oliver got the spectacles out of his pocket. They looked old, their metal frames yellow with tarnish.

‘So how blind is he, then?’ asked Kyle. ‘Try them on!’

Oliver felt his insides curdle again. Perhaps Mr Wetherstone needed the glasses to read and watch TV. Or maybe he was completely helpless without them.

Hesitantly, Oliver perched them on his nose. Kyle promptly burst out laughing.

‘You look like a complete pillock!’ Kyle cackled. ‘Your eyes are like little beads! So, can you see anything through them?’

Oliver stared at Kyle and didn’t know what to say.

He could see everything quite clearly through the lenses. Nothing was blurry or bent out of shape. There was the bridge, the flat fields beyond, the tracks below, the purple loosestrife on the sloping banks. But Kyle ...

Kyle looked about four years old.

It was still Kyle. You could see that from the big, mad, brown eyes. His voice sounded the way it always did. But now he was a little kid wearing a dinosaur T-shirt. The sort of little kid who shouted or laughed too loudly because he was hungry for everyone’s attention ...

‘Give ‘em here, let’s try ‘em.’ Mini-Kyle was lunging forward, reaching a chubby, impatient hand towards Oliver’s face.

‘No!’ Oliver stepped back reflexively. ‘You’ll break them!’

‘What did you say?’ Kyle stopped dead and glared at him.

There were danger warnings in his voice, and usually Oliver would have lost his nerve straight away. But mini-Kyle’s round-eyed stare didn’t make him look like a fearsome oncoming train. His little pink mouth was trembling, as if he might cry or throw a tantrum.

‘Come on, get a grip!’ Oliver heard himself say.

Idiot! Why did I say that? However small Kyle looked through the glasses, his fist would probably feel full-sized if he threw a punch.

Oliver turned tail and fled.



Kyle had longer legs, but Oliver had panic-energy on his side. By the time he reached the village's main street, the gap between them had widened. Oliver was getting out of breath, however, and the glasses were crooked on his nose.

He turned a corner, and pushed quickly into the Co-op. Near the door there was a small table, draped in green cloth and crowded with boxes of eggs and greetings card stands. Oliver ducked under the table and crouched, hidden by the hanging cloth.

The shop door opened again. Peering under the cloth, Oliver saw mini-Kyle's small trainers come into view.

'Hey!' It was the voice of Mrs Prentice, who ran the shop. 'I can see you, you know. You're barred, remember?'

'I'm just looking—' Kyle's voice, angry, defiant.

'I don't care! Out you go!'

The trainers retreated, and the shop door opened and slammed with venom. Oliver was relieved but also confused. Apparently Kyle didn't look like a four-year-old to Mrs Prentice, or she wouldn't have recognised him. Then again, she wasn't wearing Mr Wetherstone's glasses.

Curious, Oliver pulled the concealing cloth slightly aside, so that he could peer out. It gave him a narrow view of the aisle and the checkout counter where Mrs Prentice was serving a customer.

But Mrs Prentice wasn't there. Instead, a seven-year-old girl with wavy, red hair was manning the till, excitedly gabbling away with Mrs Prentice's voice. She had a wickedly infectious grin and a pair of old-fashioned headphones slung round her neck. Her customer was a good-looking teenage goth boy, peeping shyly through his long, black hair.

Oliver pulled off the glasses, and suddenly the little girl was replaced by tall, plump-featured Mrs Prentice. As she talked, though, Oliver could still see the seven-year-old's mischievous smile glimmering in her face like sunlight.

The goth boy transformed into a balding, middle-aged man who had always seemed a bit glum and severe. He gave a pompous-looking head flick, the way he often did, but now Oliver suspected that he had once used it to shake long hair out of his eyes.

Mrs Prentice glanced in Oliver's direction, and he let the cloth fall back, hoping she hadn't spotted him. Footsteps approached.

'I know you're under there,' she said. 'I can hear panting for breath. My eggs don't usually do that.'

Oliver hid the glasses in his pocket and crawled out from under the table, his face burning. He seemed to be in trouble a lot these days, but he never got used to it.

'If you want to play hide-and-seek, do it somewhere else!' Mrs Prentice continued. 'You could knock something over! Don't make me bar you too!'

Usually Oliver would have stared at his feet and let the scolding wash over him. This time he looked at Mrs Prentice's face and noticed the amused twinkle in her eye.

'Sorry,' he said.

'What were you doing under there, anyway?'

Oliver's phone suddenly vibrated in his pocket, saving him from having to answer. He pulled it out of his pocket. It was his mother calling.

'Oliver.' Her sharp tone was a bad sign. 'Where are you?'

'I'm just at the shop—'

'You're supposed to be upstairs! Home! Now!'

\*

Oliver knew he was in trouble, but how much trouble? Was it just for sneaking out of the house without permission? Or had Mr Wetherstone recognised him after all and reported him? Oliver half-expected to see a police car waiting outside his house. But there were no police, just his mother yanking the front door open as he approached and gesturing him inside.

'I got a phone call from Miss Simm from the Neighbourhood Watch,' she said wearily. 'She asked whether I knew that my son was with Kyle Carpenter out by the railway line.'

That was the worst thing about Barhurst. To many people knew you by sight.

'We were just on the bridge, not the tracks!'

'You sneaked out, so you could hang around the rails again! Did you even listen to me last time?'

Oliver said nothing.

It's boring at home! There's nobody to talk to! You're always, always working! You don't even remember I exist most of the time, or maybe you'd notice when I wasn't here!

He'd yelled that at her once. Now those remembered words hung in the air between them like smoke. When you said something like that, it stayed said.

'I just ...' His mother sighed. 'I wish you listened to me the way you listen to Kyle. I know he's your friend but ... you could do better.'

Oliver remembered the petulant scowl on mini-Kyle's face. A bratty little kid, losing his temper for no good reason. All this time, Oliver had been living in fear of that temper. Suddenly that seemed silly and a bit embarrassing.

'Yeah,' he muttered very quietly. 'I know. He's ... a bit of a prat.'

And that, apparently, was the right thing to say. Oliver felt some of the tension go out of the air. His mother had a lot more to say, of course, but more calmly. At last she tutted and gave him a quick little hug.

'I just worry about you, you know?' she said.

After she had retreated to her room again to carry on working, Oliver sidled up to her door and peered in at her through Mr Wetherstone's glasses.

At his mother's desk sat an exhausted-looking, snub-nosed girl about the same age as Oliver. She stared at the numbers on the screen, forehead creased in bewilderment. Her expression reminded Oliver of the way he felt during maths homework. I don't understand any of it! And there's so much of it! I can't do this!

Five minutes later, Oliver slipped in quietly and put a cup of tea next to his mother's elbow. She glanced up in surprise, then smiled.

'Thanks, pet.'

\*

From his bedroom window, Oliver could look down on people along his road and watch them through Mr Wetherstone's glasses

There was no doubt about it. Seen through the spectacles, everyone looked like a younger version of themselves. It was funny finding out which of the local adults had once had a brace on their teeth, or acne, or a liking for ugly pink leg-warmers. They weren't acting any differently than usual. It was just that everything they did made a new kind of sense once you saw who they used to be.

So why did Mr Wetherstone have a pair of magic glasses?

It wasn't even a useful kind of magic. Spectacles that let you look through walls, or see into people's heads, or zoom in like telescopes – those would be cool. But glasses that made everyone look younger? Why would anyone want that?

Was Mr Wetherstone magical too? Oliver realised that he didn't know very much about him. He was probably the oldest person in Barhurst, so bowed-over and papery that he made Oliver feel uneasy. He looked like a sudden noise might tear him.

But Mr Wetherstone had always seemed ordinary. Just a part of Barhurst that had always been there, like the rain or the roar of the trains. Oliver's mother had stopped to talk to him now and then, but he had never said anything interesting.

How are things with you, Beth? And how's young Oliver? That was all.

Remembering the kindly way the old man always twinkled at him, Oliver felt guilty again.

But did the old man really need his spectacles to see? They weren't ordinary glasses, they were magical youngification glasses. Surely he wouldn't be blind without them?

He must be, Oliver thought suddenly. If he could see without his glasses, he'd have recognised me when I was on the balcony. He'd have told the police. Nobody's come to arrest me ... so maybe he really does need the glasses.

Oliver remembered the old man's desperate, plaintive cry.

Please.

\*

The next morning, Oliver changed his mind about ten times on the walk to Mr Wetherstone's house.

Maybe he could leave the glasses in an alley? They might get handed in and find their way back to their owner. Or ... they might get trodden on or eaten by a dog. Steeling himself, Oliver kept walking.

He approached Mr Wetherstone's apartment building, then came to a halt. The old man was standing by the main entrance, talking to a policewoman.

It was PC Lal, who had once given a talk at Oliver's school. She had daunted them into good behaviour – so neat and calmly stern, her keen, dark eyes sweeping over them all like a searchlight. Now the sight of her set Oliver's heart banging. Was it too late to walk away?

'Of course I'll ask around,' she was telling Mr Wetherstone. 'But ... maybe you could keep an eye out for them too? Just in case they ... show up in your apartment after all?'

'I didn't imagine it,' the old man said, with the lost, sad tone of someone who does not expect to be believed. 'I know, I know it's an odd thing for anyone to steal, but someone really did take my glasses from my balcony ...'

The misery in the old man's voice broke Oliver out of his terrified paralysis. He took a deep breath and walked towards the pair at the door, his knees weak.

'Excuse me!' he called out, a little squeakily. 'I just found these.' He held out the glasses in one shaking hand. 'I don't know who to give them to.'

Mr Wetherstone gave a little gasp of relief and delight. 'Those are mine!'

'Where were they?' asked PC Lal, aiming her searchlight gaze at Oliver. He flushed, feeling as if the word 'guilty' must be glowing from his face like a neon sign.

'In the grass over there,' he said, pointing towards the gate.

'Maybe whoever stole them threw them down as he was running away,' said PC Lal. Evidently she was starting to believe the old man's story.

Oliver held his breath. If Mr Wetherstone was going to expose him as the thief, it would happen now, wouldn't it? He waited for the sword to fall. But it did not.

\*

'Thank you,' said Mr Wetherstone, after PC Lal had gone, and Oliver had helped him up the stairs to his apartment. 'I do appreciate this, you know.'

Oliver stared at his own feet, his stomach a cauldron of guilt.

'You've always been a kind boy, Oliver,' the old man went on. 'I hoped you'd bring them back.'

It took a moment or two for his words to sink in.

'You ... knew? That ... it was me?'

'Oh, yes. I'm not completely blind, you know. Though ... I am rather lost without these.' Mr Wetherstone tapped the glasses perched on his nose. 'I suppose I really should get some spares.'

Oliver stared at the spectacles and couldn't choke back his curiosity any longer.

‘Mr Wetherstone, where did you get those?’

‘An optician in Clytheborough, I think?’ The old man looked a bit surprised by the question.

‘But ... they’re magical! How do they do that? Why do they make everyone look like little kids?’

‘Like little kids?’ Mr Wetherstone stared at Oliver in utter bewilderment. ‘Sorry, but I ... I’m not sure what you mean.’

Oliver stumbled through an explanation, feeling more foolish with every word. It sounded ridiculous. It was ridiculous. Had he imagined it all, somehow?

‘Hmm.’ The old man polished his glasses. ‘That is very strange. Then again, the world is a very strange place. The longer I live, the more impossible things I see, and the less they surprise me.’

‘No, I don’t know why you saw what you saw. But ... we tend to rub off on the things we own, don’t we? I’ve had those glasses a very long time. I change the lenses when I must, but I keep the frames. So maybe they’ve started to see the world the way I do.’

‘What do you mean?’ asked Oliver. At least Mr Wetherstone seemed to be taking him seriously.

‘I’ve lived in this village for eighty years. Everyone here – I’ve known them all their lives. When they look at me, they see an old bore who needs to be humoured. But when I look at them, I see the children they were, and still are really.’

‘Take that fine young policewoman who was here just now. I know she sees me as a muddle-headed old duffer wasting her time. But I look at her and I see ... little Amita who always stood up to the school bullies and protected the younger children. How could I ever be annoyed with her?’

Oliver chewed his lip, thinking of mini-Kyle, the seven-year-old Mrs Prentice and the child version of his mother. He would never be able to see any of them quite the same way.

'So the glasses are ... haunted?' It didn't sound like quite the right word. 'By your memories?'

'Perhaps. Or maybe I just see people as they really are. When somebody grows older, their younger self is still there inside them. Sometimes it's almost like a child wearing a big adult-suit. They have to pretend to be brave, or serious, or frightening, when inside they just want a hug, or some fun.'

'That sounds ... sad.' Oliver was struggling with the idea.

'Not really!' Mr Wetherstone laughed. 'Think of it this way. All the people we've ever been are alive inside us somewhere. Isn't that wonderful? Isn't that better than losing our past and being hollow inside?'

Oliver looked up at the old man's smile. And even though he was no longer wearing the glasses ... he saw.

He saw the younger face that had always been there beneath the wrinkles, the eyes that were still spring-blue. He glimpsed Mr Wetherstone as he might have looked as a young man: tall and kind-faced, with deep, thoughtful dimples. Then he looked harder and saw a boy his own age, watching him with the same calm, clever smile. Someone that you could tell anything without him teasing you. A boy that Oliver would have liked as a friend.





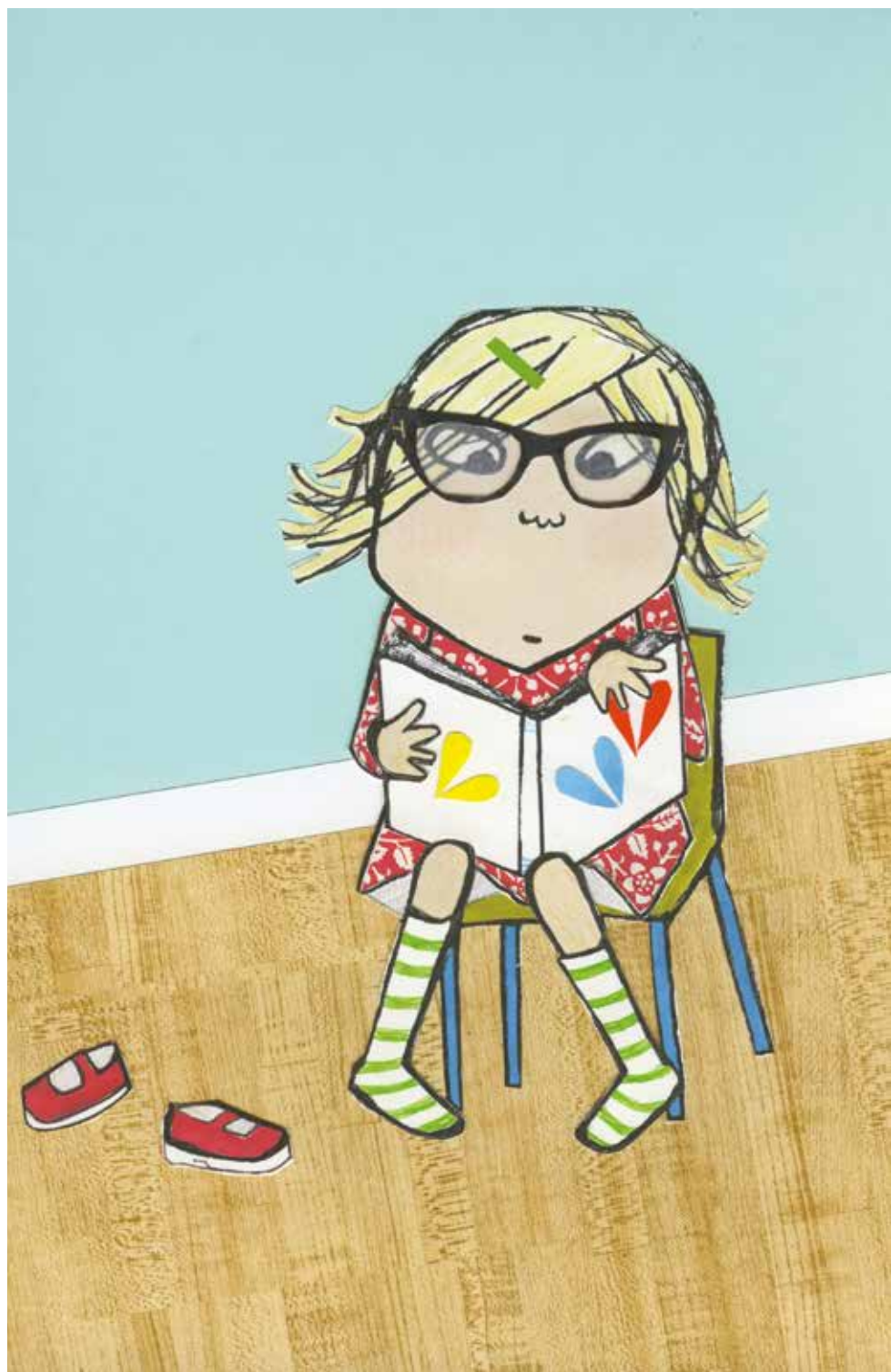


ILLUSTRATION

# ***LOLA IN GLASSES***

LAUREN CHILD

I took this from the artwork I created for *A Dog With Nice Ears* – a story where Lola imagines how her dog might need to wear glasses. I chose to illustrate this thought in the book because many small children have to wear glasses, if only for a short period of time. Yet it can cause anxiety: the worry that you will stand out, look strange or be seen as different. I wanted to show Lola utterly confident in her glasses, happily reading, not once considering that she doesn't look anything but good. P.S. I ALWAYS wanted glasses when I was little.





MEMOIR

# HOW I LEARNT TO STOP WORRYING & LOVE MY GLASSES

DAVID BADDIEL

When I was young, on mine and my brother's birthdays, my dad would always show a black-and-white film of the 1966 World Cup Final. Now I know that might sound dull to you, but this was before the internet, and that was the kind of thing we thought was entertainment. He had an old film projector, and he would project the film on the only white wall in our house, which was in the living room. Every other wall was covered with extremely tasteless wallpaper. Again, you may have to refer to your parents, if they were alive in the 1970s, as to why this was.

On my sixth birthday though, I noticed something, which is that I couldn't quite see Bobby Moore (the England captain) lift the trophy without squinting. I told my parents this, and next thing I knew I was down the opticians – HP Ellerman's in Maida Vale – for the first of many occasions in my life where a white-coated person would shine a light very closely into my eyes and intone softly, 'look left ... right ... now up ... and ... down.' Their face is always very near when they do this, isn't it? Luckily, all opticians, as we know, have sweet-smelling breath.

I wasn't that keen on them at first. Glasses, I mean. I liked playing football a lot – still do – and thought having glasses would make that difficult (no one ever mentioned the phrase 'contact lenses' back then).

I was worried, correctly, that I would keep losing or breaking them. But I was mainly worried that glasses would mark me out as a nerd. I'm not sure we had the word 'nerd' in the early 1970s, but whatever word we did have, it would have meant the same. Glasses meant that I was a bit swotty, a bit bookish, a bit ... speccky.

As it happens, all those things are true about me. But I'm not sure I wanted them to be. I was even less sure I wanted them to be said about me by other people, which is what happens when you wear glasses. People decide that you are a bit swotty, a bit bookish, a bit speccky from the fact that you are wearing speccys. People decide a lot of things about you from the way you look, none of which are – even though these ones kind of were, about me – necessarily true. And one of the earliest times you find this out is when, as a child, you get glasses. It probably didn't help in my case that I did break my glasses a lot. Which meant that I sometimes would have to wear them with one broken lens repaired with Sellotape, and sometimes without one arm, falling off my ears.

Also, at the time I got glasses, I had a straight nose. A few years later it had a bit of a bump in it. Which it still does. I put that down to the top of my nose having more trouble growing because of the weight of my 1970s NHS glasses. I thought – and secretly (well, not that secretly, I'm putting it in this book) – still do, that the bump in my nose would never have been there without glasses. And that without that, clearly, I would've looked like George Clooney.

It was even worse when I became a teenager. Because then I wanted to look cool. There is more room for that now with glasses than there used to be because, now, there are a lot of what I believe are called role models who wear glasses. But when I was becoming a teenager, in 1970s Britain, there was no one young and cool who wore glasses. There were a lot of short-sighted old and middle-aged men and women, but, seemingly, none of the pop stars I liked. They wore platform shoes and make-up, but not glasses. Eventually, in about 1977, a pop star appeared called Elvis Costello, and he helped make glasses cool, but I was already 13 by then and it felt a bit late for my coolness.

I grew up to be, as well as a writer of children's books, a comedian. I noticed that having glasses as a comedian – even though some very great comedians before me had worn glasses (it's one of the very few

showbiz professions where it seems to be allowed) – meant that people would again decide things about me, before I'd even started making jokes. I would be heckled (that means people in the audience would shout things at me) by men saying things like 'four eyes!' and indeed 'speccky'. Quite quickly, I found clever things to say back to these men – in comedy these are called put-downs – and so it wasn't a big problem. If I'm being entirely truthful, sometimes these men would say much worse things that I really can't write in this book for children.

The point about this is that, all in all, it's a big deal when you first realise that you're going to be spending your life wearing glasses. It can be a bit annoying, and it can make people pre-judge you. Plus I'm still breaking my glasses, and forgetting where I've put them. In fact, I'm now getting to the stage where I'm forgetting where I've put them when I've put them on top of my head.

But here's the thing. A few years ago, my eyesight started to change. Now, I don't need to wear glasses all the time. I need them for reading and for writing – I'm wearing them now – but these days, strangely, I can see most things that aren't right in front of me perfectly well.

Which meant I could go around, and meet people, and appear on TV and on stage, without glasses.

I should have been pleased. At last, I should have thought, people will see me for who I really am. They won't pre-judge me as someone a bit speccky. They will think I'm cool. They will think I look – apart from the bump in my nose, obviously – like George Clooney.

Weirdly, though, that wasn't what happened. What happened instead was that I saw my face without glasses in the mirror, and thought: who is that? That doesn't quite look like ... me. Which is odd, because a) it was me, and b) it was my face, naked, without a bit of plastic and glass in the way. A bit of plastic and glass, which, however you look at it, is not actually me.

What had happened, I think, was that over many years, and without really realising it, I had come to accept my face with glasses. To accept that my face kind of ... suited glasses. That without them, my nose seemed inordinately longer, the shadows under my eyes much darker, and pimply, hairy bits of cheek previously hidden sprang into view;

without glasses, I turned, basically, into the BFG. And that the bump in my nose wasn't an ugly bump, which stopped people seeing my essential Clooney-ness, but actually was a perfectly-shaped glasses-stopper (stopping them from falling down my nose, that is).

So now, sometimes, I wear glasses EVEN THOUGH I DON'T REALLY NEED TO ANYMORE. If I go out without glasses, within seconds, I'm looking around for my glasses, EVEN THOUGH I DON'T REALLY NEED THEM ANYMORE. I feel, without my glasses, wrong.

Which is all in aid of saying, if you are 7 or 8 or 11 and you've just got glasses, and you think, 'Hang on. These things on my face have changed my face and the way people think about me and the way I have to live my life forever!' then ... well, yeah: they have. But after a while, you won't quite recognise yourself without them. Ask George Clooney. He wears glasses. Mainly dark ones, to avoid being recognised at all, but still.



STORY

# ***A BEAUTIFUL HEART***

SILVIA ARAZI

Once upon a time, in an ancient region of northern Italy, there was an attractive young man who claimed to have the most beautiful heart in the place.

One afternoon he stood on a platform in the main square of his town and proudly proclaimed that he owned the most beautiful heart in the city.

A large crowd gathered around him, and everyone admired him and confirmed what he said: his heart was perfect, since there were no imperfections or opacities in it. Everyone agreed that it was the most beautiful heart they had ever seen.

Seeing himself admired, the young man was even prouder, and sticking out his chest like a peacock, he said:

‘It’s as beautiful as a ruby, isn’t it?’

‘Yes. Like a ruby!’ they all said, amazed.

Suddenly the village carpenter, a very old man, came up and said: ‘Why do you say that, young man, when your heart is not remotely as beautiful as mine?’



Surprised, the crowd and the young man looked at the old man's heart and saw that — although it was beating vigorously — it was covered with scars and even had some empty areas, where pieces were missing.

The amazed look of the people said it all.

'How can this old man say that his heart is the most beautiful?' they murmured. 'Poor thing, he must be crazy ...'

'Yes, he must be crazy,' a woman yelled, laughing.

The young man looked at the old man's heart and also laughed.

'It's a joke, right?' he said. 'To compare your heart with mine ... Mine is perfect, young, healthy, glossy. It is as beautiful as a ruby!... Instead yours ... yours is a bunch of scars and pain.'

'It is true,' said the old man. 'Your heart looks perfect, but I would not want to be your friend ... Each scar on my heart represents a person to whom I gave my love ... And these traces remained, of which I'm glad, because carrying them with me reminds me of the love I offered. There were times when I gave my heart to someone, but that person offered me nothing in return. Hence these holes remained ... giving love is taking a risk, sometimes suffering, but despite the pain these wounds cause me, they remind me that I still love and nurture the hope that someday — perhaps — they will return and fill the void that they have left ... do you understand now?'

The young man remained silent.

After a few minutes he approached the old man, ripped a piece from his young heart and offered it to him. The old man, in turn, ripped off a piece of his and covered the open wound that had remained in the young man's heart.

The young man looked at his new heart.

It was no longer perfect, or pretty, or glossy.

It no longer resembled a ruby ... And yet he saw that his was now a beautiful heart, very beautiful ... he knew it for the first time.



ILLUSTRATION

# *TO SEE WITH EXACTITUDE*

MARIANA RUIZ JOHNSON

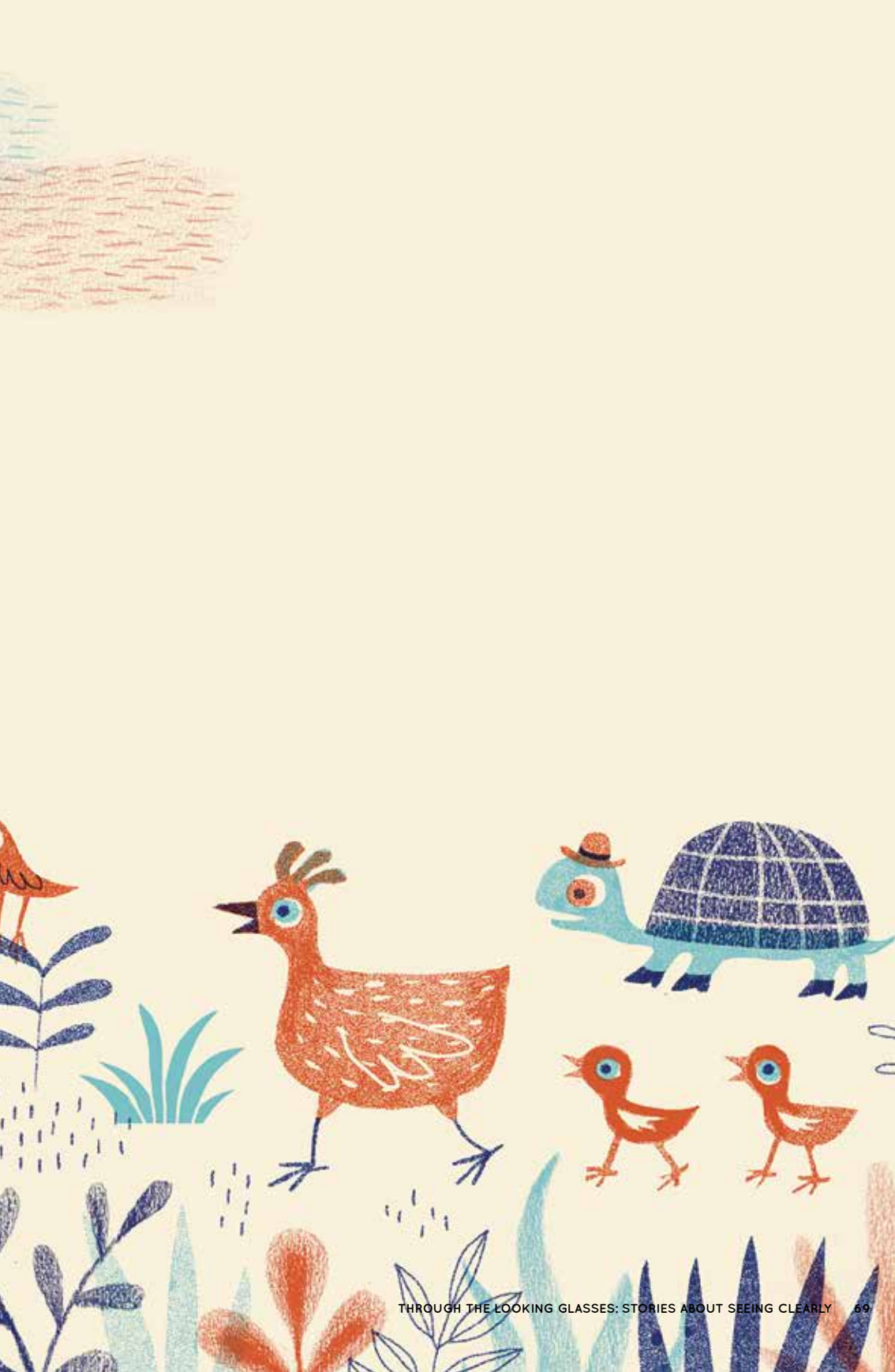
This illustration is part of a story written by the Argentine poet Laura Wittner. It tells the story of an old rabbit who decides to take off his red-rimmed glasses: from there he'll go through some surreal and exciting adventures. In the end, however, he reflects: "to see with exactitude, way better to wear glasses!"



















STORY

# UNCLE MERVIN'S SPECTACLES

KATHERINE RUNDELL

*Based, very, very loosely, on a story by Hans Christian Andersen.*

Once upon a time – three hundred and forty-four years, five months and a day ago, to be exact – a man named Spinoza sat down over a fire, and made a pair of magic spectacles. The frames were wire, and the glass was clear, and they looked like nothing special, as is often the way with magical things. But they were extraordinary, for they allowed the wearer to see into the hearts of those around them. This was, to be frank, both extremely delightful and extremely disconcerting, and the glasses caused several marriages and two medium-sized wars, before they vanished.

But they were not lost. They were stolen by an elderly aunt, who had had enough of the havoc they were wreaking, and were passed down her family, from most sensible person to most sensible person.

Andrew Christiansen was not the most sensible person in the family. He was twelve, small for his age, prone to daydream and evening-dream and night-dream. He spent all his time imagining impossible possibilities, and trying to invent new colours from his box of paints. It was important that the glasses – which currently belonged to his Uncle Mervin, who lived alone in a house painted brown – went to the person with the least imagination: it was only that way they stayed out of trouble.



But now, there the glasses were, perched on Mervin's seat at the theatre in London. He had taken Andrew to the pantomime, and he had gone to buy ice-cream – vanilla, because chocolate was too unsettling – and the glasses lay unguarded. Andrew's fingers twitched. He couldn't stop himself: he picked them up, as delicately as if they were alive, and put them on.

Immediately, the world blurred. And there, in place of people's faces, were their hearts; to look at each person was like walking into a room. Andy wasn't sure what he'd been expecting, but not that; it knocked the breath clean out of him. He began, carefully, slowly, to edge along his row.

One elegant woman had a heart like a room in a museum, with all the failings of her friends carefully preserved in plaster and kept in neatly labelled rows. One heart looked like a great pillared building, with vast windows through which poured light, and flying through it a cascade of birds of every colour. In another heart, there was meat – nothing but piles of meat. Andrew, startled, took off the glasses, and saw the famous face of man who owned a billion-pound airline. The man frowned and blew his nose at Andrew until he moved on. Another heart was full of needles and roses – another, full of shooting stars, ricocheting off the walls of a simple, plain bedroom. Two people – one in seat D5, one in seat D9 – had hearts that were riotously passionate about kitchen appliances; some people went mad for a good toaster, it turned out. At the end of the row was a little girl's heart, a gorgeous tumult of grass and wind and galloping horses.

Andrew came to the end of the row, gasping to catch his breath. This, then, was what Uncle Mervin had been able to see – the wild wonder of it! Surely, he thought – surely, everyone should have a chance to see it: to see how strange we are. Even the most normal-looking of us – even people who had serious haircuts and carefully unemotional shoes – were deeply, magnificently peculiar.

Then a sudden hand descended on his shoulder, and he leapt half out of his shoes. 'Andy, lad,' said Uncle Mervin's voice. 'Is there something you want to explain?'

Andy whipped round, the glasses still on his nose, and he gasped. Uncle Mervin's heart was a vast artist's studio, and the walls were coloured every possible colour, colours both imaginable and unimaginable. And at the centre of it, there were two portraits: a woman, who Andrew had never seen before, and Andrew's own face.

Andrew snatched the glasses off and stared up at his uncle. For the first time, he saw the laughter lines around his uncle's eyes and the sardonic hook to his eyebrows.

Before he could stop himself, he burst out, 'But – I thought you were the sensible one!'

Mervin did not, surprisingly, seem annoyed. 'Aye, maybe I started out that way,' he said. 'When your Great-Aunt Bette gave me the specs. But not anymore, lad! Not after what I've seen.'

Andy did not waste time apologising and explaining – that could come later. 'Everyone should see it, Uncle Mervin!' he said. 'Just for one day. Just for an hour, even – a minute!'

There was a smile twitching at the corner of Mervin's mouth. 'I've been thinking the same thing, these last few years. What if every person got just one day, when we could see it all – the marvels and darkneses and joys in people's hearts? It would be a miracle of a thing, lad! Why do you think I left them on the chair, for you to see?'

'What? You did it on purp—'

'The thing is, Andy – they can cause a fair amount of mayhem, those specs.'

'Not if everyone passed them on and didn't hoard them. Not if you wore them once and let them go. They should belong to everyone!'

Mervin opened his mouth – and closed it again. Without another word, they edged their way out through the crowd of people returning to their seats for the second half and out into the frosty city night. They stopped in a quiet park. Mervin took out his penknife, and in microscopic handwriting he scratched on the earpiece of the spectacles: 'Wear Me Once And Pass Me On'.

'Is that going to be enough to persuade people?' said Andy.

So Mervin added, in even neater letters, on the other ear: 'Or I Will Come And Reclaim Them, And You Won't Like That.'

'I'll know where they are, I reckon,' he said. 'After so long in their company, we've got a link, the two of us. I'll keep an eye on them.'

They set the glasses down on a park bench and walked away. Neither looked back. Mervin fished out the two pantomime ice-creams. They had melted, but they were surprisingly delicious: a kind of vanilla soup.

The ice cream reminded Andy of something important. He caught at Mervin's brown sleeve. 'Can we go back to the pantomime?'

'Aye, if you want – but it'll be over soon.'

'I know,' said Andy. 'But I want you to introduce the people in D5 and D9.'

The spectacles have been on the move, now, for several months. They have caused more than one marriage, and a great deal of wonder, several ruined pairs of trousers where people have had to sit down in astonishment on the pavement and, as yet, no wars. Keep an eye out! Because they might come to you. Wear them once and pass them on.

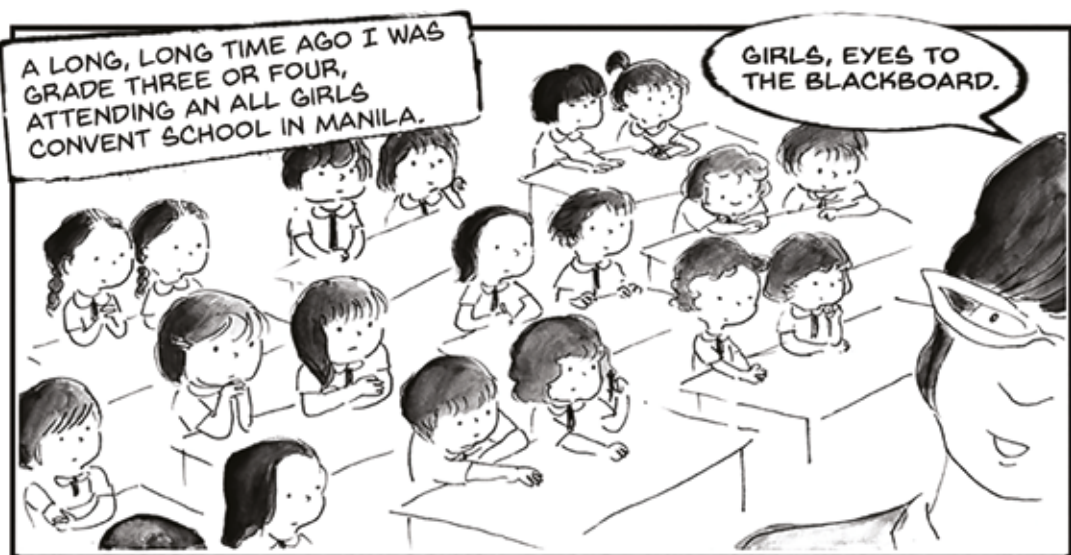


COMIC

# ***MAKING FACES AT MY TEACHER***

CANDY GOURLAY

When she was a little girl, Author Candy Gourlay thought everyone had the same eyesight as she did, until one day...



I COULDN'T SEE THE BOARD ...



SO I SQUINTED ...



... AND SQUINTED ...



... AND TRIED ...



... TO SEE.



SUDDENLY ...

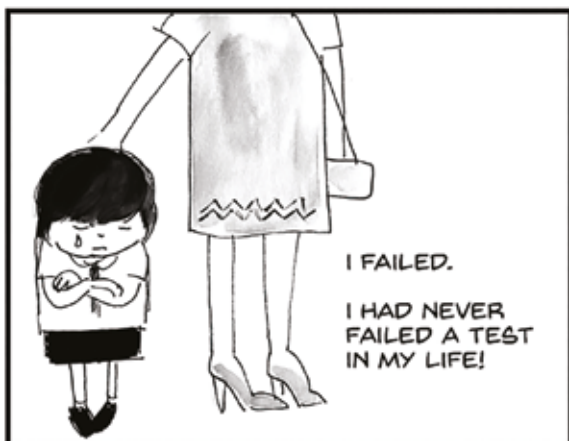




THE NEXT DAY ...

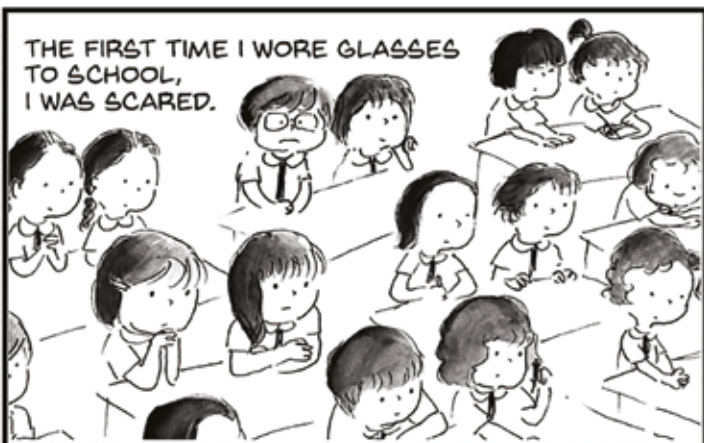


MOM TOOK  
ME TO THE  
OPTOMETRIST  
TO TAKE AN  
EYE TEST.





THE FIRST TIME I WORE GLASSES  
TO SCHOOL,  
I WAS SCARED.



AND THEN...



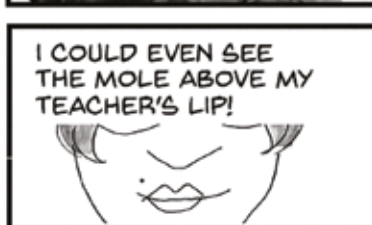
I REALIZED ...  
I COULD SEE!



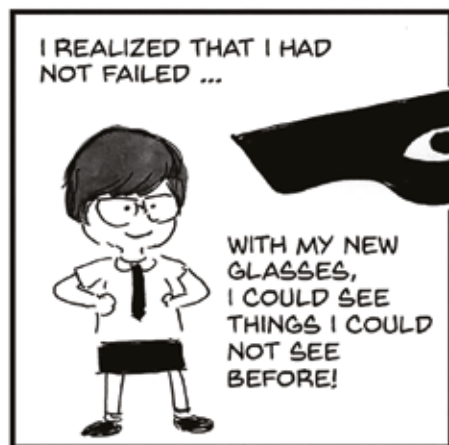
I COULD READ THE  
BLACKBOARD!



I COULD EVEN SEE  
THE MOLE ABOVE MY  
TEACHER'S LIP!



I REALIZED THAT I HAD  
NOT FAILED ...



WITH MY NEW  
GLASSES,  
I COULD SEE  
THINGS I COULD  
NOT SEE  
BEFORE!

I HAD A  
SUPERPOWER!



**THE END?**  
**IT WAS ONLY THE BEGINNING!**



MEMOIR

# ***WAYS OF SEEING***

OLIVE SENIOR

To this day, I can still remember putting on my first pair of glasses in the optician's office and stepping outside. I was seven or eight years old. What I saw stunned me so much that at first, I just stood there, open-mouthed and speechless. When I recovered my senses, I clapped my hands and danced around shouting: 'I can see. I can see'. Then I would stop and silently gaze all around, trying to absorb it all. The adults laughed at what they considered my antics because, of course, they didn't see what, for the first time in my life, I was suddenly able to see.

I was already quite a reader and often had my head buried in a book. The Jamaican mountain village where I grew up did not have a doctor or clinic. Going to an optician or wearing glasses in those days was rare; glasses tended to be associated with what was regarded as a superior class of people – the parson or the schoolteacher or the postmistress are the ones I remembered. It took a long time for someone to notice that I probably held the book right up against my nose as I read, and that I needed a vision check; it turned out I was terribly near-sighted.

The day I stepped out of the optician's office with my new glasses was like entering a world where everything seemed more up close and personal, more alive, more colourful, more intense, more vivid. A world



that was in front of my eyes all along but had often seemed hidden behind a fog or veil.

I became overwhelmed by the intensity of colours and a landscape that revealed itself in patterns and details, no longer as dense blocks of colour but layered, with clearly defined edges and shapes. Trees at a distance now thrust their individual trunks, shapes and leaves at me, of every shape and shade of green. Flower beds yielded up individual patterning. For the first time, I could see far into the distance and follow our river's meandering. The dark masses became clear-cut mountains beyond which other mountains rose, separated by bands of mist.

My newly opened eyes were making my other senses become more intensely alive – scent and taste and hearing and touch – I wanted to savour everything at once. I felt somewhat like the heroine of my favourite book, *Alice in Wonderland*, who entered into a magical new world in which nothing was as she knew it, and where familiar objects were constantly transformed into something else. Even the adults I had known all my life looked different, their features more clearly defined, some frightening, some more endearing.

Eventually, my excitement died down, and I accepted my 'double vision' which is how I thought of it: the difference in what I saw when I put my glasses on and when I took them off. I discovered a useful trick. I could take my glasses off so as not to listen to or hear annoying people, for hearing was better with seeing.

Wearing glasses as a child didn't bother me as it gave me a certain status; I became the centre of attention in my primary school as kids crowded around to ask questions and beg me for a 'borrow' so they too could look through my lenses. In the town where I went to high school, kids wearing glasses were not a novelty.

I became self-conscious about it when I was a teenager and consumed with vanity; then I spent far more time fussing over the type of glasses frame that would be most flattering. When I started working, I switched to contact lenses and wore those for many years but then had the inconvenience of also having to wear glasses for reading or dark glasses when outside in the sun. I eventually gave that up and went back to glasses which is what I am wearing now. Modern lenses that can fully

adjust to the various requirements of distance, reading or sun protection all in one, a far cry from the thick lenses of my childhood.

I want to make it clear that my journey to seeing did not end with having my sight corrected or with wearing glasses. That is only where it began. And the lessons I learnt are applicable to everyone, including you who might be fortunate enough to have excellent uncorrected eyesight.

I was to grow increasingly aware that there is a difference between merely looking and really seeing, between sight and vision, and that this applies to everything in life. Ways of seeing include learning to examine what lies beneath the surface, learning to 'read' the world, so to speak.

There is a religion called Rastafari that was started in Jamaica (Bob Marley was a member). Rastas have invented a whole new way of using language to reflect their world that is based on 'reasonings' or trying to penetrate the surface of things. One of my favourite Rasta word usages is 'Seen'. With a question mark ('Seen?'), it is asking if you understood what was just said. Not just, did you hear it? But, did you see it in your mind's eye? As a statement, 'Seen' is affirming that the listener is also making that effort to understand at a deeper level.

That is what I was learning to do, once I began to apprehend the physical world with such clarity. I found myself examining everything more closely, starting with the natural world. I was noting variety and patterns that I hadn't seen before; I was becoming much more aware of similarity and difference – and that everything had its own distinctiveness. The shape and colour of a leaf, the way each bird species built its nest, the way rain fell in slanted patterns or straight down, the glisten of sunlight on river, the moss on the underside of rocks.

I was learning too the differences between people because I could observe more acutely their gestures and expressions which sometimes were not in keeping with their actual words. Over time, my deepening ability to see beyond the surface enabled me to make more sense of the world. I could make better judgements or form opinions of my own. A visionary lens – penetrating beneath the surface – allowed me to develop my imagination and a creative self.

Language is full of sayings that relate to vision or sight that can guide us into a deeper appreciation of this most important of the five senses. Even

though many of these sayings are so overused they are called clichés (we know them by heart because we hear them so often). A treasured person is ‘the apple of one’s eye’. ‘In the blink of an eye’ involves something happening quickly. ‘To see eye to eye’ is to think like another person, while ‘to throw dust in the eye’ is to mislead or trick someone.

Often, we make judgements based on what we see before testing the other senses because ‘seeing is believing’. So we’ll find food more appealing if it looks good, before we check out the taste or smell. We admire people for their appearance before we get to know what they are really like.

Perhaps upending some of these popular expressions might help us to see differently? Thinking that ‘seeing is not believing’ might set you on a path of curiosity, of questioning or wanting to examine the distinctive patterns, differences and similarities of our beautiful world. To your surprise, you might find out there’s more to it than meets the eye.



POEM

# LENSES

KEVIN ISAAC

Nights find me chasing  
daylight  
where the sun never sets.

In my eyes,  
time, like life,  
is dressed in beautiful colours,  
unified and fragmented,  
as bold memories and rainbows  
Longing to take shape.

In daylight,  
a friendly darkness lingers.  
It embraces me.  
It renews me  
with constant companionship.

In my eyes,  
dreams hold my hand.  
They point me to the stars.  
I watch them swing idly  
on embers of sunlight  
bathed by raindrops

of tiny water strokes  
painted on warm canvas in my mind.

Where is the sun?  
What has become of the moonlit stars,  
the scented raindrops;  
the beautiful flowers,  
and sweet nectar  
that once dawned in my eyes?

Today, I watched you stare at my face  
as if I were a puzzle for you to sculpt.  
I felt you study me  
as if I were a vague display piece,  
an awkward sculpture propped up  
against the craggy looking glass;  
waiting to be perfected  
for the unveiling.

But behind my eyes  
lie talents, a hunger,  
experiences, desires.

I am not yours to fix.

I heard you search your mind  
With tipsy curiosity  
as you mined your soul for warmth.

But you need not worry -  
Time has kissed my face  
and soothed my cheeks with dreams -  
Flowing gently  
like a cool evening's dew,  
tumbling in slow motion.

Daylight finds me, again...  
pondering a world  
where your lenses finally cast me  
Not as different

But simply... as me.



ILLUSTRATION

# ***CHILD IN GLASSES***

RANDA HADDADIN

I drew this young girl to celebrate all girls and their innocence - girls are beautiful with and without glasses. With clear vision, they can continue to healthily explore the world!





MEMOIR

# ***WHEN I WAS TWELVE***

JENNY KAY DUPUIS

I stand outside the car next to my father, waiting to enter the powwow grounds. The sounds of the neighbourhood overtake my feelings of loneliness: the crackle of tyres as cars pull into the gravel parking, the thud of car doors, and rubber-soled shoes squishing in wet soil.

I feel a sense of emptiness. My heart. My mind. My body. My spirit.  
I feel broken inside.

Today I had woken early, realising there were times when I don't quite see my world clearly. I had been searching for where I belong. I feel like I'm on the outside, looking in. Whoever I'm with, I don't feel like I fit in. It's been a long, slow struggle for a lot of people like me.

I was born in the city. However, I spent my life growing up on Nipissing First Nation, a reserve located along the shorelines of Lake Nipissing in northern Ontario, Canada. It's a place that my relations have called home for thousands of years. My father never talked much about the culture, though he'd take me for long walks through the bush, telling me stories, and capturing brilliant images with his camera. Many years back, the country had passed laws that sought to control First Nations peoples



in Canada. It tore my dad's family apart. Especially as the laws restricted their movements and practices. It wasn't their choice. We lost our culture. We lost our traditions. We lost our language.

Nowadays, the annual traditional powwow is held in early fall. With other efforts to reclaim the culture; the powwow events help to foster pride among the people, and enrich and ensure the survival of their customs and traditions. On this day, my dad and I rush to the top of the bleachers although it's already crammed, and people are squeezed tightly together. I sit next to a grandmother who is familiar with my family's life stories. She's one of the few remaining keepers of cultural knowledge, history and traditions. She's also a successful businesswoman. There aren't many people left like her. There's something in her words that always speaks truth to me.

The drummers and singers take their seats around Grandfather Drum. They begin to beat out the Grand Entry song with long drumsticks. The drum grows louder as the rhythm speeds up. The vibration travels through my body and deep into my heart, awakening me. 'Can you hear the sound of the heartbeat? Welcome home, dear,' the grandmother whispers to me. 'Our community does these things so the next generation can have access to them.' I smile warmly, resting my chin in my hands, staring out across the open grass field, waiting for the dancers to come out.

Everyone stands for the elders, veterans, head dancers and other dignitaries. The eagle staff and flag carriers lead the Grand Entry. Then a parade of dancers is guided into the round arena. I lean forward and squint, trying to bring everything at a distance into focus. My dad waves his hands around, signalling for me to get my glasses out. I shrug my shoulders. I feel shy of wearing them in public. 'Sight is one of your gifts. Gifts are not meant to be taken for granted. It'll help you along your learning journey,' shared the grandmother. I half-heartedly pull the glasses out from my backpack. I spray a bit of cleaner on the front and back of each lens and wipe the liquid around with a soft yellow cloth. I am careful not to touch the lenses, using two hands to put on my glasses. The thick red-rimmed plastic frames rest comfortably on my nose. It's the first time that I have allowed myself to look through my new eyeglass lenses properly.

My eyes automatically open a little wider, and I look around, focusing on the expressive dance styles. The dancers are wearing beautiful regalia with bright flying ribbons and coloured materials swaying in time to the beat of the big drum. 'Grass Dance'. 'Fancy Shawl'. 'Intertribal'. 'Women's Traditional and, Jingle Dress'. 'Men's Fancy'. Some songs and dances come with stories or lessons about special victories, historical roles, love and healing. Some songs test the dancers' speed and agility. Some honour or give thanks to others. Some are social songs. Centuries of history lives in each of the drumbeats. Centuries of history breathe in each singer's voice and each dancer's steps.

It is the fast, fluid, energetic steps of the women fancy dancers that hold my attention. They move swiftly like butterflies with shawls wrapped gracefully over their shoulders, and their arms spread out as if they were ready to soar through the air with their wings. I stand in awe, overwhelmed with admiration for the dancers.

The gift of sight is a turning point. I am experiencing my culture in a way that I had not dreamed of.

As time rolls on that day, I realise that I'm creating a series of my own images that will last forever in my memory and can be used to bring stories to others, opening their eyes too.

I live in a beautiful world surrounded by family, history and tradition.

*We are a resilient people. We are still here. I am still here.*

Look around you.



-o-o-

STORY

# ***FULL COLOUR***

CAROLINE DUSABE

ILLUSTRATION BY DOLPH BANZA



My glasses and I make a great team! Together we travel far and near.

We take walks in imaginary and real forests alike We observe tiny creatures dancing under my microscope. We do great mischief and have lots of adventures too!





But, sometimes we are separated. Sometimes I lose my glasses and that is no fun at all.



Without my glasses I am sad and confused. Without my glasses I am not me.



Sometimes I fear talking about losing my glasses. I am afraid that my parents will be mad at me.





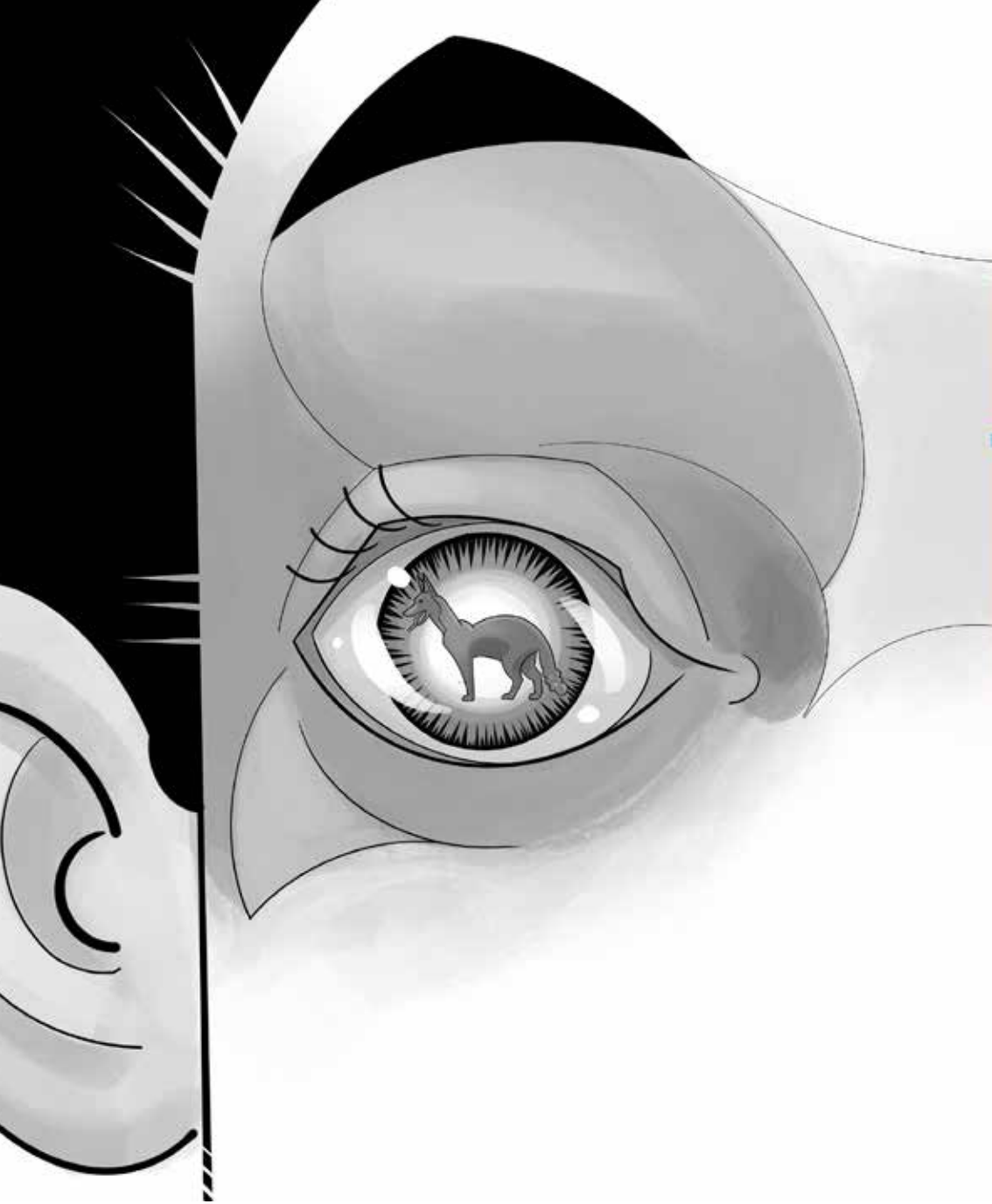
I am afraid that my friends will laugh at me. I want to talk about it because without my glasses I am not me.



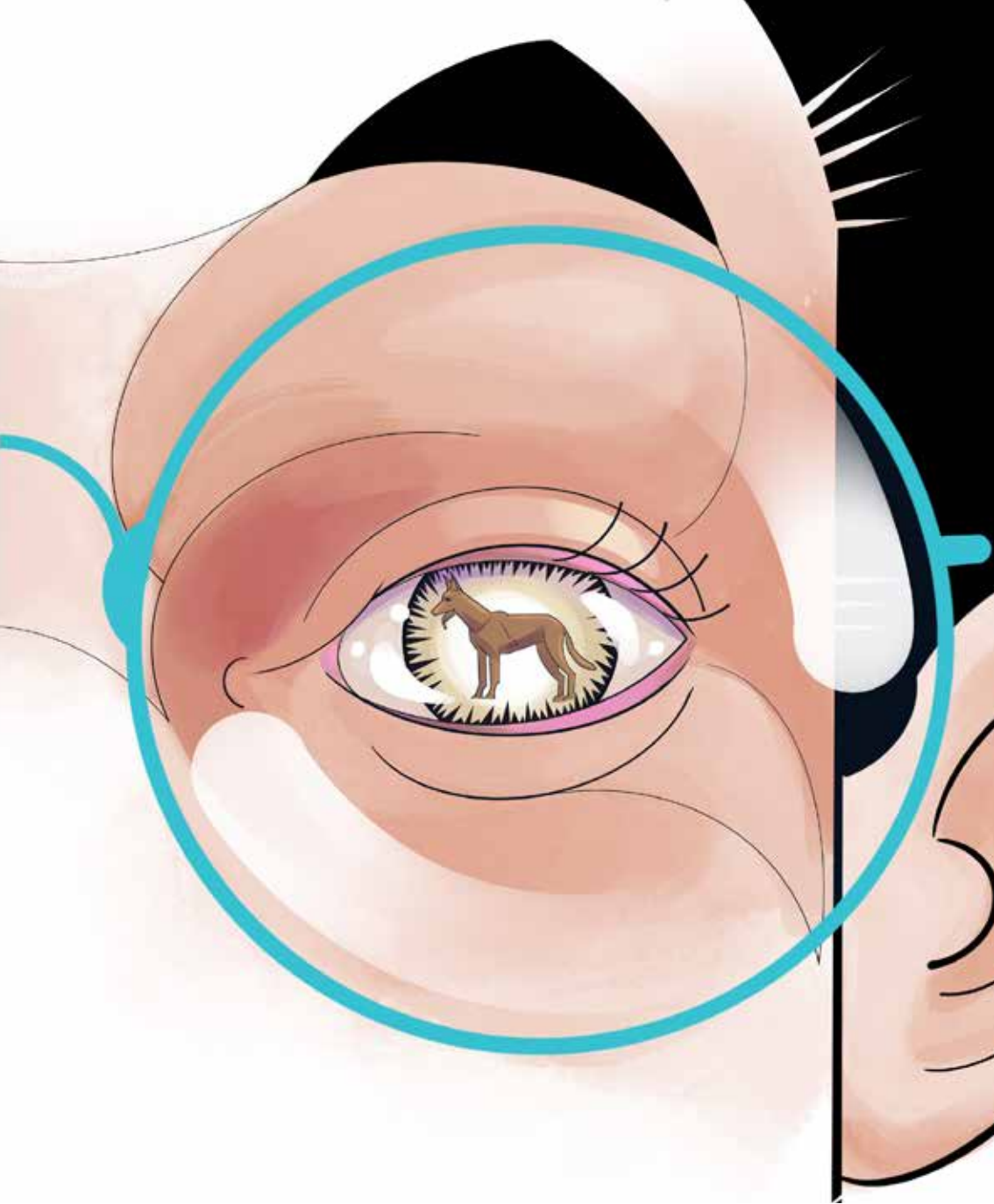
Without my glasses, the words on the page of my book are a blurry rainbow dancing from left to right. A string of endless oooooos and iiiss that mean nothing.



With my glasses, the words on the page of my book make sense.  
They are well-chosen and well connected letters.  
My gate into new and wonderful adventure.



Without my glasses I see shapes and shadows. I wonder “Could that be a dog or a cat? But why does it look like a three legged creature?!”



With my glasses I am certain. I know for sure that is no cat at all!  
I know for sure that it is a four legged creature.

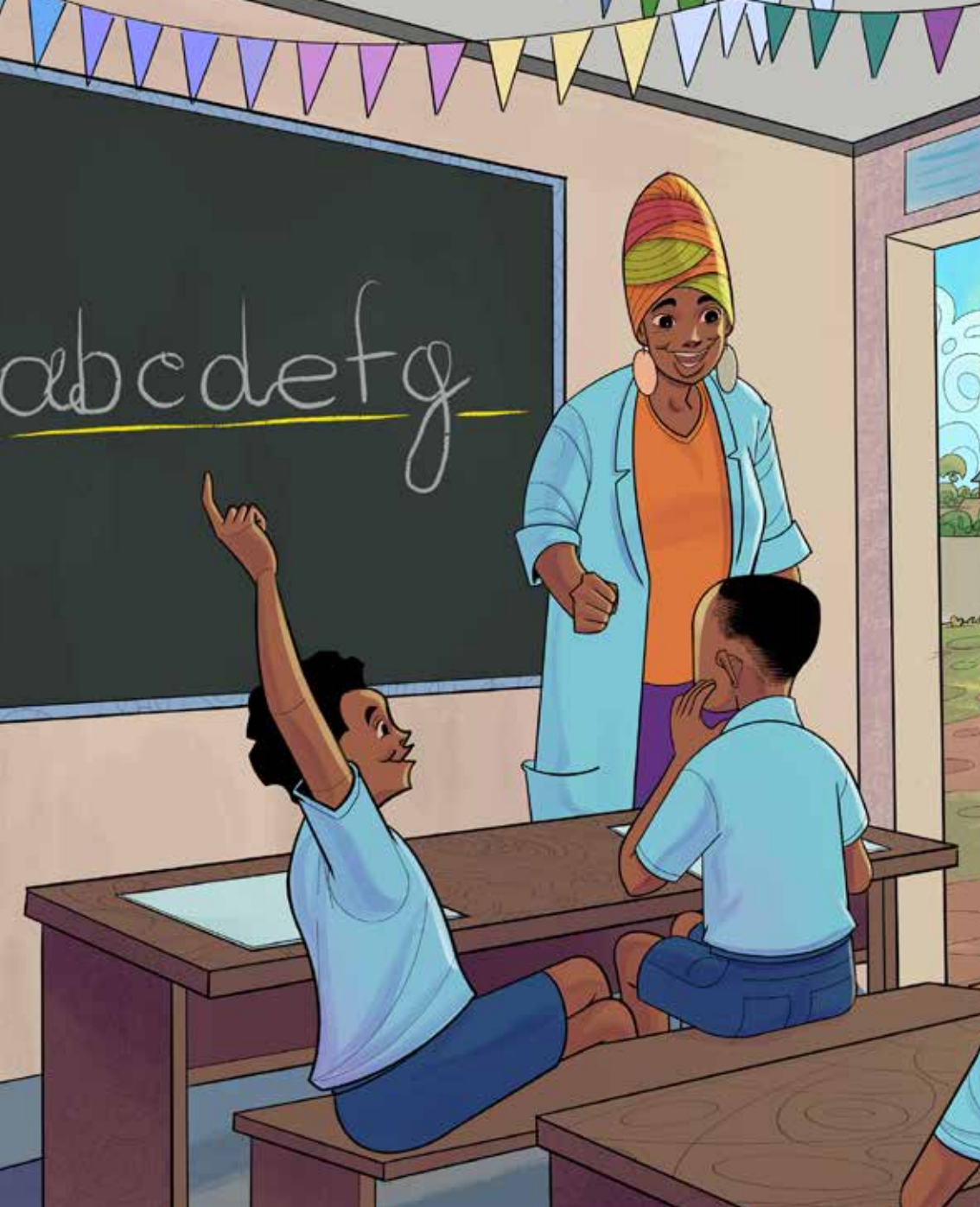




Without my glasses I have to kiss the board to read a thing!



My neck aches from craning to look at the writing board.



With my glasses I can sit anywhere in the class and read everything!





I can sit back and relax like the rest of them.



Without my glasses, the only sound I hear is the pounding of a hammer.  
A constant head ache. I am truly upside down!



With my glasses I hear quiet. I can whisper “Sshhhsss! I am thinking. I am creating. I am on top of the world!”





Without my glasses it's a dull dull world! I wonder "Is that flower red or maroon?"



I wonder “Is that bird grey or black?”



With my glasses I can see the brilliant red of the flower. I am certain the bird outside of my window has grey feathers.

With my glasses it is full color!



STORY

# ***EXTRACT FROM 'TOTO & THE NINJA CAT AND THE GREAT SNAKE ESCAPE'***

DERMOT O'LEARY

ILLUSTRATION BY NICK EAST





She looked over at her brother Silver, who, as his name suggests, had silver and white fur, with a big bushy tail and white paws.

Toto, on the other hand, was a big ball of black, grey and brown fur, especially with her winter coat on. She had a ruff around her neck, which made her look like a cat that wouldn't be out of place in Elizabethan England, as opposed to where she was really from – a place called Puglia, in the heel of Italy. She and Silver were stray cats, and they had arrived in London only three weeks ago, after they were rescued by two kind humans, who they now call Mum and Dad. (Or, as Toto would say, Mamma and Papa.) The ones who currently lay snoring in their bed.

'Silver,' whispered Toto. 'SILVER! Did you hear that? I think it came from outside, from the bins ... OUR BINS!'

'I didn't hear a thing,' said Silver, yawning and stretching.

'Yes you did, you liar, that's why you're awake. Look, this is our house now – that means it's our turf! We have to go and investigate.'

'OK, well, maybe I did hear something, but it could be foxes! Have you seen the size of them? They're not like the countryside ones we're used to. These guys are mean. Terrifying! Let's just stay here and wait for it to die down.'

'YOU'RE SCARED!' said Toto.

'Well, er, no, it's just that it is a very cold night, plus the cat flap is such a pain to open, and ... Oh yes, all right, I admit it. I'm a bit scared. Look, Toto, we've been in this country for three weeks, we're just trying to fit in, it's cold, we're warm-blooded and Italian, and now I've been woken up by who-knows-what downstairs, and you're asking me to go and investigate. WHY DON'T YOU GO?'

'Silver, that could be a little tricky. I'm blind, remember?!' said Toto.

Toto had a point. She was as blind as a bat and had been since birth.

Actually, that's not totally true. Firstly, she'd already met the neighbourhood bat, Eric, and whilst she didn't get a chance to have a chat – something about 'insects to catch, no time to stop' – he certainly

didn't seem blind. And secondly, well, she could see something ... Up very close her eyesight was just about OK, but from further away all she could see were light and dark shapes. She could recognise outlines of things (like Mamma and Papa), cats (like her brother), birds outside (they looked tasty!) and really anything that moved. But she always liked to have Silver by her side. Yes, he was a pain at times, teasing her, but like most big brothers he was fiercely loyal and loved his sister very much ... not that he would EVER say that in public.

'Yes, sis' replied Silver, 'I know you're blind, but you're also a ninja, remember?!'

Now, he had a point. Toto was in fact one of the most skilled ninja cats on earth: a member of a select elite club of cat ninjas, with skills she'd learnt as a kitten from her master in Italy, an old ship's cat call Ventura, who had in turn learnt from his master in Japan, who in turn could trace his ninja skills back hundreds of years ... In other words, yes, Silver had a point. Toto could look after herself.

'Fine,' said Toto. 'Let's go down together. You for your eyes—'

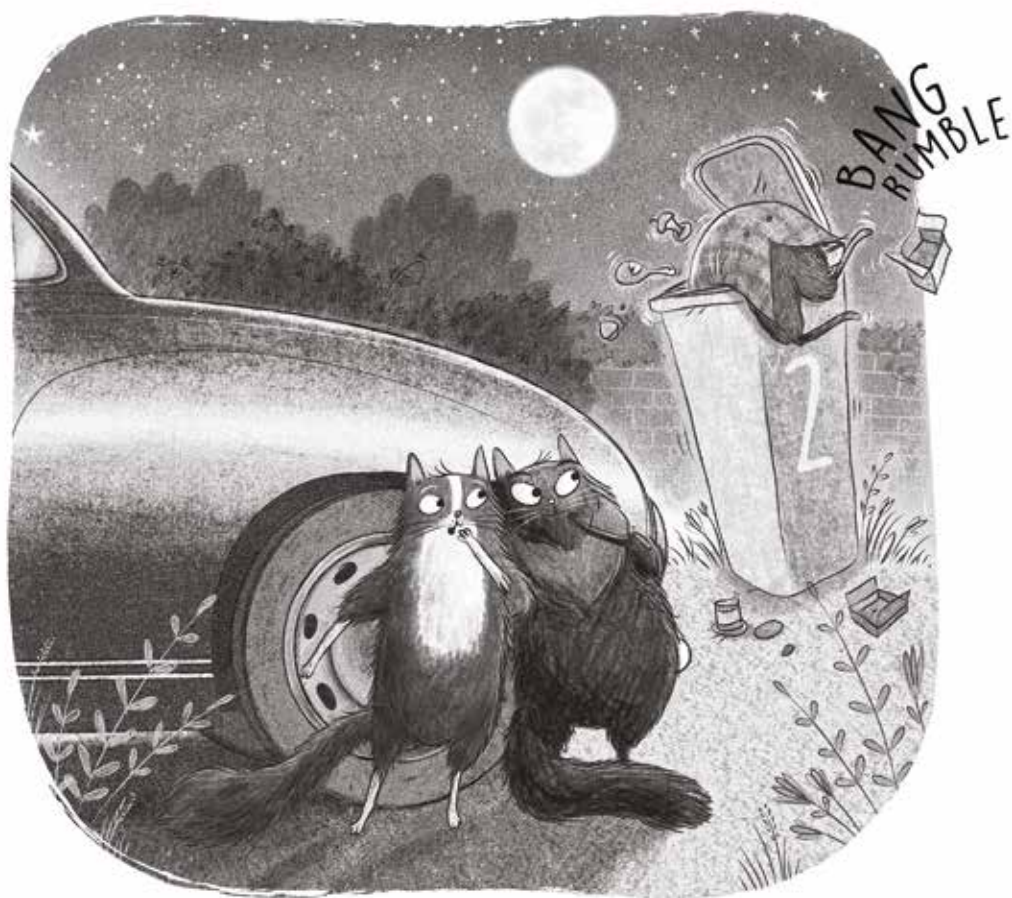
'And charm,' Silver added.

'Yes, and charm,' said Toto, rolling her eyes, 'and me for—'

'Your deadly ninja skills,' Silver finished.

'Deal,' said Toto.

'DEAL,' said Silver.



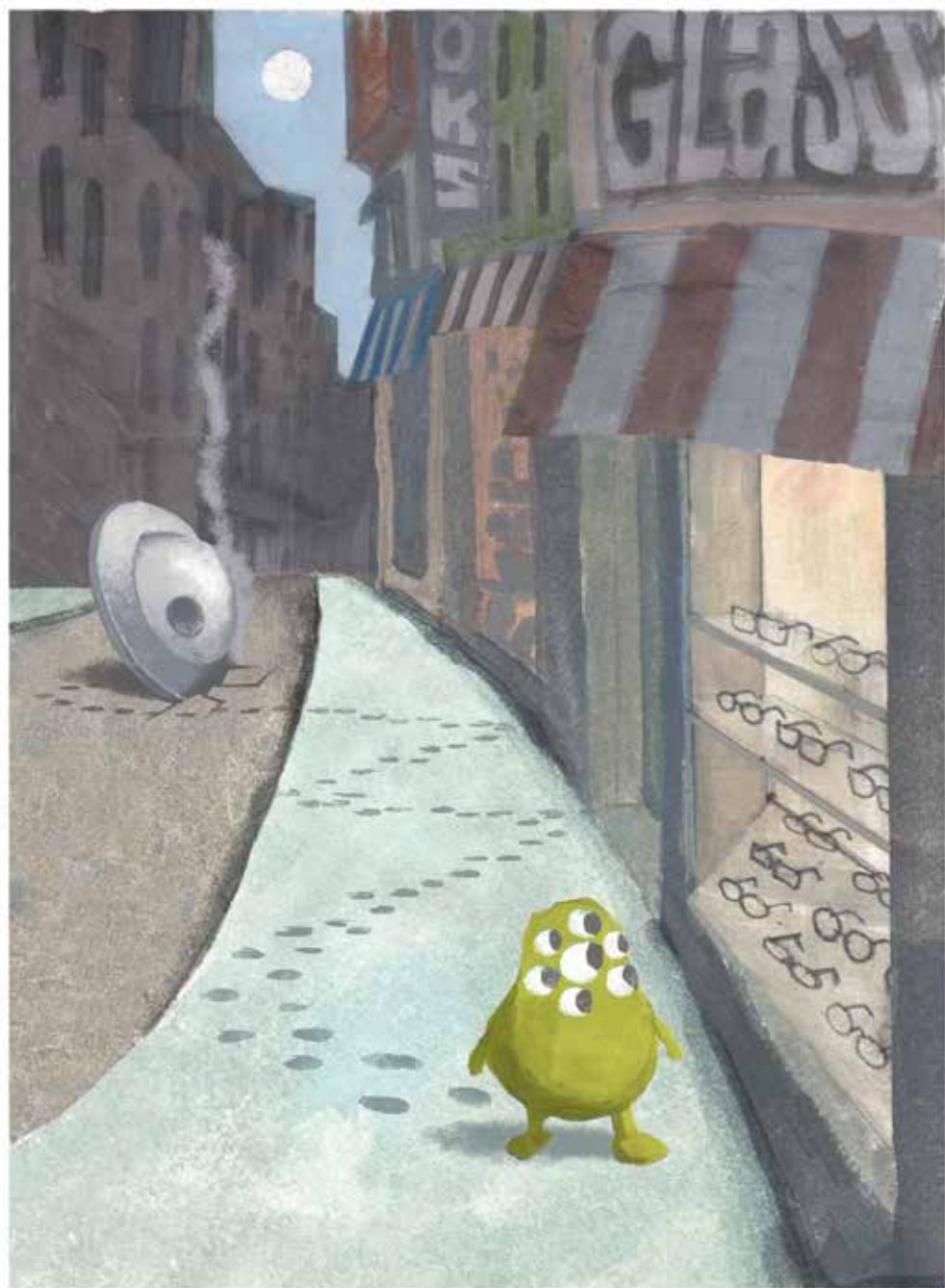


ILLUSTRATION

# ***NEAR-SIGHTED VISITOR***

JON AGEE

A near-sighted extra-terrestrial crash-lands on planet Earth, just down the street from an eye-glass shop. This is good news for the seven-eyed greenish visitor; only I hope he or she is not in a rush. Special orders can take weeks.





STORY

# *TWIN PERSPECTIVES*

CHITRA SOUNДАР

The night was eerily quiet. No stray dogs barking, no cats mewing like babies, no late ramblers with insomnia problems. The moon was just a sliver, hiding behind the clouds, helping her blend in with the dark.

Bhooma jumped over the low wall and fell on top of a heap. There was no way to tell if the pile was just old leaves and newspapers, or whether it involved poison ivy or even a snake pit. Bhooma scuttled around to the back of the house. Her heart was beating fast. Normally she wouldn't have trespassed under cover of darkness. Especially not into a pawn shop. But these were not normal circumstances.

When the clock turned 12, Mr Gupta's shop and house would change hands, and belong to a builder whose demolition crew would be arriving in the morning. It would be illegal to enter the house after that. This was her only chance to rescue her great-grandfather's ancient legacy, which rightfully belonged to them. And she had only until midnight.

\*

Before that weekend, the thought of trespassing into Mr Gupta's shop wouldn't have crossed her mind. But it was one of those weekends when everything that could have gone wrong went wrong. Mum had to go

away on a work trip. But her car broke down. So Dad had to take her in his car, and he wasn't happy about it.

Her nerdy twin sister Rati was left in charge of the pair of them, under their grandparents' supervision. They normally took turns to give the orders, and, unfortunately for Bhooma, it was Rati's turn that weekend.

When Rati was in command, she made Bhooma do all the chores while she bossed her around. So when Grandma asked for some pots to be brought down from the attic crawl space, Bhooma had readily volunteered. A dark place with spiders was better than the smirks of her twin sister.

As Bhooma rattled around in the attic, she came upon an old railway trunk. Bhooma flashed her light on the latch and lifted the lid. There was an old globe, a box of keys to unknown locks and stacks of old, musty-smelling silk shawls. Under the shawls was a carved wooden spectacle-case. Before she could open it, Grandma called from downstairs, 'You can come down now.'

Bhooma was in no hurry to go back downstairs. But the light was dim, and the dust was irritating her nostrils. She picked up the spectacle case and climbed down. Rati was in the garden with Grandpa. Good! She could inspect her treasure in peace in their room. Rati wasn't into treasure hunting. Or any kind of adventure. Not exploring caves. Or even a hike.

Bhooma sat on her bed and opened the case gently. Under the lid, on the purple silk, a name was embroidered – Nilmesh Rao. Their great-grandfather. He was an explorer of sorts who had travelled on British ships to islands far away and had watched the European zoologists catalogue findings of now-extinct animals and birds. Curiosity doesn't just kill the cat, it kills dodos too, she thought.

'What are you doing?' yelled Rati as she pushed the door open and barged in. 'We've been asked to sort Grandpa's bookshelf.'

'You do it,' said Bhooma. 'I just did some stuff for Grandma.'

The spectacle case peeked out from under the pillow.

'What have you got there?' asked Rati.

‘Nothing,’ said Bhooma.

Rati was a factoid freak and took her bossing duties very seriously.

‘Don’t lie to me,’ she said, pulling the blanket off the bed.

The secret was out. Rottweiler Rati wouldn’t let it go until she knew everything she possibly could. Curiosity was going to kill us both, thought Bhooma.

\*

THUD!

Bhooma stood up and looked around. What was that noise? She checked the time. She had only 48 minutes before midnight. She had to be home by then ...

‘Hey!’

Bhooma’s head swivelled so fast that she feared it might have fallen off and rolled away. ‘What are you doing here?’ she hissed.

‘I can’t let you have all the fun, can I?’ asked Rati. She too was dressed in black. She must have borrowed Bhooma’s running gear without permission. But this was not the time to argue about it. She might be a hindrance rather than a help, but Bhooma couldn’t risk upsetting Rati, the complainer. Didn’t Grandpa always say, “Keep your friends close, keep your enemies closer”?

‘Shh!’ Bhooma whispered, with a finger to her lips. She gestured for Rati to follow her. Bhooma wedged the window open. It must have been their lucky day. The window didn’t have bars or mosquito nets. Either the house was ancient, or Mr Gupta hadn’t believed in mosquitoes.

‘Is this legal?’ Rati whispered.

‘Yup, until midnight,’ said Bhooma. ‘Not a second later.’

Bhooma pushed herself up on the windowsill and jumped into the room inside. The floor was covered in dust. No one had been here in weeks or months.

Rati collapsed behind her in a heap. She brushed herself down which made the dust rise into their nostrils.



'Aaa ...' she started. Bhooma pinched her nose and stopped the sneeze.

They hoped there wasn't anyone inside. But still, it's never a bad thing to be careful. Careless folk get killed. Like dodos on an uninhabited island.

They tiptoed across the room and opened the door. They were in a long corridor. Bhooma switched on her flashlight and Rati followed.

\*

When Rati had found out about the ancient spectacle case, she wouldn't let go. So they had opened it together. The case was technically empty. Except, there was a chit for the pawn shop. Mr Gupta's pawn shop. Someone had pawned the spectacles and had never claimed them back.

'Is Mr Gupta over 200 years old?' Bhooma had wondered.

'No, silly,' said Rati. 'The shop must have been in the family for generations.'

'So our great-grandfather pawned it to his grandfather?' asked Bhooma. That made more sense.

'How much do you think they pawned it for? Could we buy it back?'

'From whom?' asked Rati. 'From the bulldozers?'

The last Mr Gupta had died without sons or daughters. His distant relative who lived abroad had sold off the building to a property developer. They had sent a letter to all the local residents notifying them that the bulldozers were due the next day.

'They give notice for making noise and dust nowadays,' Grandma had complained when she read the flyer.

'I wish the distant relative had asked us if anyone wanted to buy the house,' said Grandpa. 'That house was once full of treasures.'

They had paid no attention to that conversation then. But with the spectacle case and the pawn shop chit in hand, things had changed.

'Where is the notice?' asked Bhooma.

'I know where it is,' said Rati. She ran downstairs to the shed. Grandma throws away every paper into a bag. Things with silver foil into another.

Plastic into another. Newspapers were in a big jute sack. The recycling man paid decent money to take them all away.

‘Here it is,’ shouted Rati as she returned victoriously with the notice.

‘If they own this place from midnight, we’ve got until midnight,’ said Bhooma.

‘What do you mean?’ asked Rati.

‘OPERATION SPECTACLES!’

‘You’ve gone mad,’ said Rati. ‘If I see you leave, I’ll call Dad.’

That threat wasn’t hollow. Rati was the worst tittle-tattle in the entire district. She hardly had friends in school because she was always complaining to the headmistress about rule-breakers. So Bhooma crept out when Rati wasn’t keeping watch and had already settled into bed, listening to her favourite podcast with her eyes closed.

\*

A mouse scurried behind a cupboard as the spotlight shone on it. At any other time, Bhooma would have pointed at it for Rati. Rati was terrified of mice. But they had to get out of here before the night watchman’s rounds. He usually came to this part of the neighbourhood just before midnight. Their window of opportunity was getting smaller.

There were four rooms downstairs. More rooms upstairs.

‘Where do we look?’ asked Bhooma. ‘We have less than 45 minutes left and loads of places to search.’

Rati stayed quiet.

‘What?’

‘You forgot the magic word!’

‘Now? Really? Ok, please tell me, where do we look?’

‘Good girl,’ she said, as if Bhooma was her child and not a twin. ‘The reason I came looking for you was that Grandpa said something. We were arranging his bookcase which you’d abandoned, and then I said “Shame about Mr Gupta’s shop, isn’t it?”’

‘Why didn’t you tell me that at dinner?’

‘Because I didn’t know you were gone until ten minutes ago. It was a long episode tonight.’

‘Can you please tell me what Grandpa said?’

‘Right!’ said Rati, coming closer to whisper to Bhooma. ‘Mr Gupta had an old Victorian cupboard in the upstairs room. That was his special place for things unclaimed for over 100 years.’

‘What if he had already sold all the stuff in there?’

‘Aren’t you an adventurer?’ said Rati. ‘Let’s explore.’

The alarm vibrated. Only 30 minutes left. Bhooma tiptoed upstairs. Rati lagged behind.

Bhooma counted the doors. Three rooms. The first two rooms were open and empty and the third was locked. She turned around to say something. But Rati wasn’t behind her.

‘Rati!’ she hissed.

‘Shh!’ said Rati, tiptoeing up the stairs.

‘The third room is locked,’ said Bhooma. ‘I know this place is going to be bulldozed. But breaking a lock seems a bit over the top. Legally.’

‘You don’t have to,’ said Rati. ‘Here, I saw this hanging on the wall in the shop room.’

‘You’re so clever!’ said Bhooma.

‘Remember that when we return home,’ she whispered back.

‘And the magic word is ...’

‘Please,’ she finished.

Bhooma was no stranger to adventures. Once she had gone exploring the abandoned and haunted temple and found an ancient coin. But this was the first time she had done it with Rati. And that was nice. She actually liked this new partnership.

‘Stop dithering!’ hissed Rati. ‘Take the keys.’

Scratch that nice feeling, thought Bhooma.

The bunch of keys was big and heavy. Which one would fit? Bhooma handed the torch to Rati as she tried each key. Finally, one key fitted and the lock turned. They pushed the door open and went in. Inside the room was a single bed. Next to it, a wooden table. The Victorian cupboard stood on the other side.

‘What if the light is visible from outside?’ asked Bhooma. ‘The night watchman might be early and spot it.’

‘This room faces the back, my dear sister,’ said Rati. ‘You have no sense of direction.’

‘Shall we open it?’ asked Bhooma, ignoring Rati’s tone of superiority.

‘My turn to open,’ said Rati, handing the torch and grabbing the keys.

‘This one,’ pointed Bhooma at the bronze one that sparkled in the beam of the torch. ‘I’m sure of it.’

The cupboard was empty. Mr Gupta might have sold all the old things a long time ago. ‘Check the drawers,’ said Rati.

Bhooma opened and closed a few. Nothing.

‘You have to look deep inside and under the top,’ said Rati. ‘Like this.’

She reached her hands in and felt the sides.

‘Careful,’ said Bhooma. ‘Scorpions hide in dark places.’

‘Don’t scare me,’ said Rati. She looked under more drawers. ‘Gotcha!’

‘Shh!’

A leather pouch lay nestled deep inside a drawer. Bhooma opened it and pulled out what was inside.

‘Yes!’ cried Rati.

It was the spectacles they had been looking for. At least they thought these were. The frame glittered under the light.

A little chit fell out – the matching number from their copy of the receipt. ‘This is the one,’ said Bhooma with a grin.

Her reminder vibrated.

‘We must get out of here before midnight.’

‘Don’t worry Cinderella,’ said Rati. ‘We have plenty of time.’

Bhooma hid the leather pouch in her pockets. They traced back their steps, to the backroom. ‘I’ll help you,’ said Bhooma, giving Rati a boost, and she jumped out. They ran all the way home and let themselves into their room quietly.

‘Turn on the light,’ said Bhooma. ‘Let’s look at it.’

‘Wait! It’s going to be midnight,’ said Rati. ‘Grandpa will come out of his room and grab a snack. Then we can turn on the lights.’

They waited with ears to the door for a few minutes. Grandpa’s footsteps filled the silence. Then the rattle of the biscuit tin. As if on cue, the night watchman blew his whistle as he cycled past their street.

‘All clear,’ said Rati.

Bhooma and Rati turned on their reading lamps and opened the leather pouch. They pulled the spectacles out of the case and inspected them.

Rati grabbed them from her hands and put them on.

‘I can’t see anything,’ she said.

Bhooma took the glasses off her sister’s face and wiped them with her handkerchief. ‘Try it on now,’ she said.

Rati pretended to be their great-grandfather Nilmesh Rao. ‘I say, you must be Bhooma, the adventurous girl! You’ve inherited my taste for danger.’

Bhooma doubled up in giggles. Then it was her turn. She put them on and said, ‘Hey you, Rati, is it? The smart one. I love it when you break rules to help your sister.’

They both were giggling as they carefully put the spectacles back into the pouch and placed it inside the wooden case. Rati yawned. ‘It’s way past my bedtime,’ she said. ‘Thanks for the adventure.’

‘I’m tired too,’ said Bhooma. ‘Tomorrow, let’s go and watch the builders come with their bulldozers.’

‘Maybe we should start a petition to stop it,’ said Rati. ‘I’m sure I’ll find something in the district rules that they’ve violated. Grandpa might help too.’

‘That’d be fun,’ said Bhooma. ‘I’ll make the placards.’

As they crept into their own beds and looked at the crescent moon peeping through the windows, Bhooma sighed. This adventure had shown a different side to her sister. It was like when she wiped the glasses, and they could see clearly. Maybe they would save Mr Gupta’s shop. Maybe they would go on other adventures too.





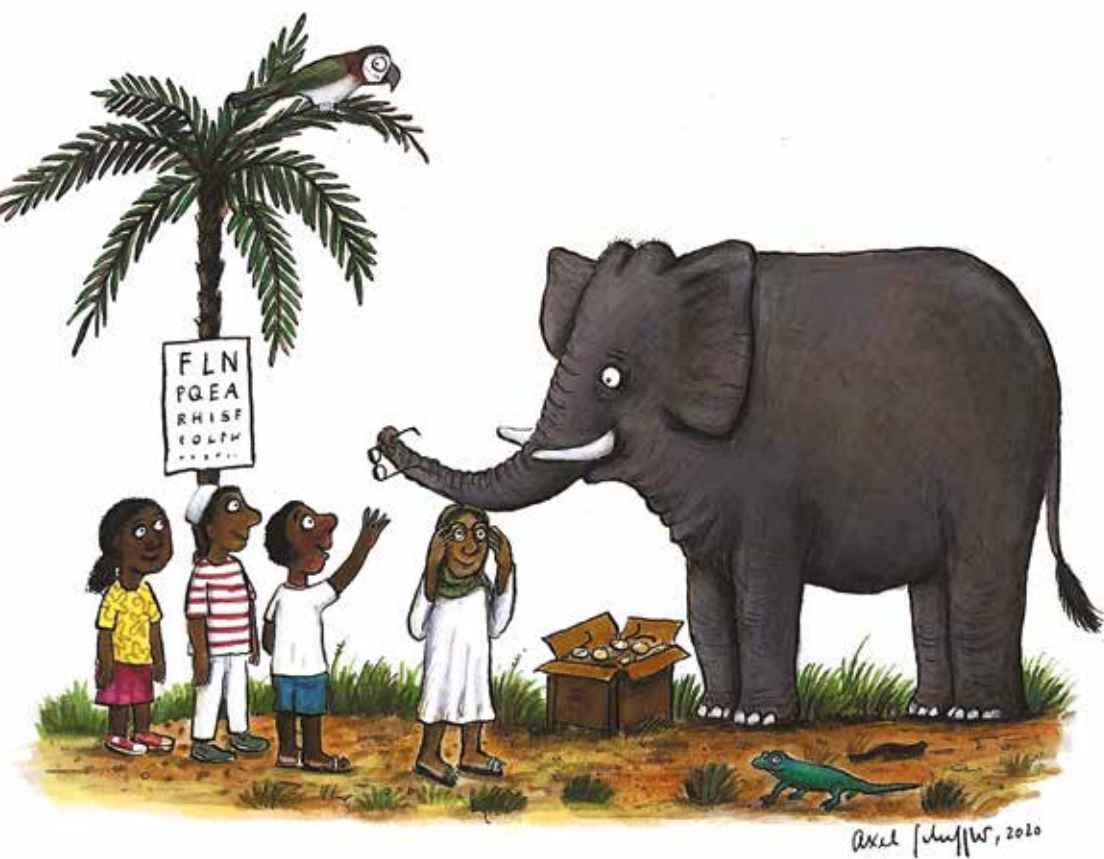
ILLUSTRATION

# ***THIS ELEPHANT DIDN'T FORGET***

AXEL SCHEFFLER

Clear eyesight is very important to illustrators. I wear glasses when I do my drawings. It's important to see for learning as well. Good eyesight combined with the memory of an elephant are a good basis for education and the possibility to improve one's chances in life. And this elephant knows it.







MEMOIR

# **CLEAR VISION**

**CRESSIDA COWELL**

I was delighted to be asked to write a piece in this anthology because clear vision is something that I have never really had, even as a small child. I have short sight and astigmatism, and whilst I didn't begin to wear glasses until my early twenties, it's obvious, in retrospect, that that was about fifteen years overdue. In my late twenties I was also diagnosed with early onset cataracts in both eyes.

Nowadays I wear contacts and also need glasses for reading or using the computer, and so I will often have two pairs of glasses hanging around my neck because I have a way of losing things if they aren't tethered to me. Though I can, technically, drive, I haven't for a long time. I have grown accustomed to the world swimming in and out of vision. Often I will be sitting trying to draw, and the contacts will swivel on my eyes, and everything will go all blurry. So, I will pause for them to settle (they have to be the right way up to adjust for the astigmatism), or carry on drawing in a slightly misty fog. I am very lucky in lots of ways – I have access to great eye care, and my bad eyesight does not stop me doing anything – but I can relate in a very small sense to what it feels like to have to compensate in other ways for a limitation, especially as a child.

I was always in trouble at school because I was very disorganised, and the bad eyesight didn't help. It's hard to keep track of things when you can't see properly. I didn't look at the teachers, because I couldn't really

see their expression, and teachers often didn't like that because it felt like I wasn't concentrating. I was often accused of 'being in another world'. And I couldn't see the blackboard. My strategy was to copy anything I needed from the person next to me, which did work but was rather haphazard and stressful as a coping system. Ironically, probably one of the reasons I was such a reader was that books close-up were something I could actually see.

I have vivid memories, aged about ten or eleven, of waiting for the bus to go to school, and every day being unable to read the bus number. So, I used to stick out my hand for the bus I thought might be right, and get on it. If it turned out to be the wrong number, I would often get on it anyway, out of sheer embarrassment, and go a few stops before getting off and figuring out how to get to school from there.

Thinking about it now, it's interesting that I didn't tell an adult about my difficulties, and I'm not quite sure why. Children can be secretive creatures. Did I think everyone had the same problems? Did I not want a fuss? Was I embarrassed? Why did no one around me notice?

My eyesight has influenced my work as both an author and an illustrator. My style as an illustrator is wild and whirling, and I tend to do a lot of mark-making. I'll often be thinking about how to create mood whilst I'm drawing, rather than the fine detail of how things look, and I have to work hard to correct that. My children were very amused when I tried to draw a pear, and I put the stalk on the wrong end of the pear. But if you grow up not being able to see clearly, your visual memory often isn't very good. So when I am doing 'world-building' illustrations, like my snow cats in *The Wizards of Once*, for example, or the more epic scenes in *How to Fight a Dragon's Fury*, everything has to be looked up on the computer for reference: boots, shoes, leaves, lynxes, scales, everything, because I just can't remember what things really look like, and detail is important if you are trying to make a child feel your world is real.

Without really meaning to, I use writing as a tool to process feelings, and eyes and eyesight are a constant theme in my books, sometimes consciously, sometimes unconsciously. Wish in *The Wizards of Once* has an eyepatch, which of course was a thought-out decision, and Perdita, the tutor character, has six pairs of enchanted spectacles, which have lives of their own and are always running away from her. You find out in

the very first chapter of *How to Train Your Dragon* that Fishlegs has a squint that makes him as blind as a jellyfish, and Gobber the Belch only has one working eye. There's also a dragon called One-Eye.

But even beyond characters' physical characteristics, seeing (or often not seeing) and having to look at situations in different ways is a refrain that runs throughout my books. A crucial plot point in *Dragon* centres around the Dragon Furious seeing into the future with clear and unwavering sight, when others around him are blind to the consequences of a war between dragons and humans. The premise of *The Wizards of Once* is that Xar and Wish have to learn to see each other's point of view, and one of the big questions in the series is who the all-seeing narrator is.

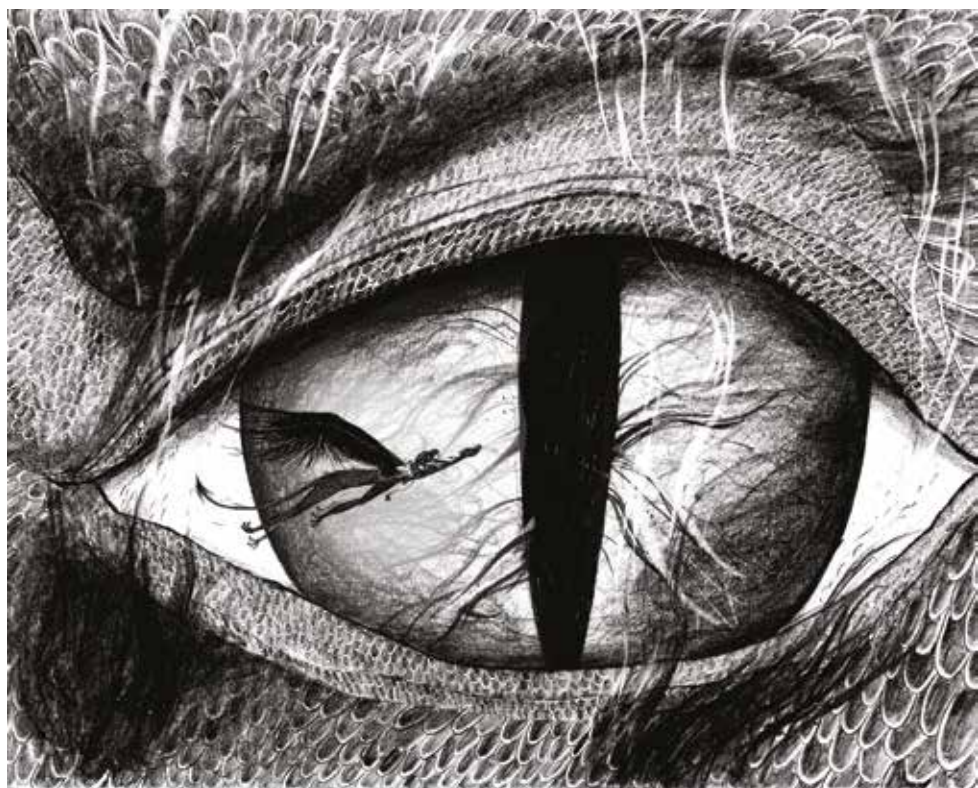
One of my cataracts was operated on a couple of years ago. I still remember the extraordinary feeling of looking through that eye for the first time; how the light was an entirely different colour – it had a pin-prick brightness to it, rather than the yellow dullness I had grown accustomed to. I recreated that moment when Wish takes off her eyepatch in *Twice Magic*. 'Looking through her left eye, it was as if she were standing on the top of a snowy mountain, where the snow was so glitteringly blue-y white that it dazed you'.

Meanwhile, the cataract in my own left eye has been gradually worsening. A fog has crept over it, like a slow-moving glacier, and now through that eye, even with my contacts and glasses on, I would not be able to recognise someone standing a foot in front of me.

I am so lucky.

I will be able to have a simple operation that can correct that.

But had I been born in another place or another time, I would not be able to write now, or illustrate. Every child in our world should have access to an affordable eye test, glasses and medical care for their vision. The first point on my *Waterstones Children's Laureate Charter* is that every child has the right to read for the joy of it: there are 300 million children globally whose barrier to reading and literacy is simply not being able to see.





STORY

# *THE GIFT*

MESHACK ASARE

Mama had just arrived at the front door after work and was having a quick chat with the neighbour, when she heard the scream from the house.

‘Ma-mm-aa!’

‘That’s Mansa shouting,’ Mama said to the neighbour and rushed inside.

‘Mansa, what is the matter? Where are you?’ she called out.

‘Here!’ came Mansa’s desperate reply.

Mama searched from room to room. She found her distraught daughter standing by the bedroom dresser with her hands covering her eyes.

‘Mama-aa, I cannot see,’ said Mansa when she heard her mother’s footsteps.

‘Mansa,’ Mama said, nearly at the top of her voice, ‘Where are your brothers? What have you done to yourself?’

But she found the answer herself. Instead of being in its usual place in the closet, her makeup bag was open on the dresser, together with cosmetics

and creams in assorted pretty jars, and pads and applicators. And as her eyes adjusted to the dim light in the room, she saw the oil that had streaked down from Mansa's face and pooled around her feet. An empty plastic bottle of body lotion was lying nearby on the floor.

Earlier, when her brothers went out to play and she had the house all to herself, five-year-old Mansa had gone to her mother's dresser. She had found the smooth brown powder, dipped the fat brush in and dusted her cheeks, so they looked shiny in the mirror. Next, she chose a light metallic blue for her eyelids. She painted her lips with Mama's favourite glossy, orange lipstick. She went over her eyebrows with a fat, black pencil, then carefully, very carefully, outlined her eyes as she had watched Mama do many times. In the mirror, her eyes had become big and all lit up like the eyes of the Queen of Egypt that she had seen in a picture.

Then she heard Mama's voice at the front door unexpectedly. She had taken Mama's face oil and cotton wool to remove the makeup, and a spurt of oil had caught her in her face and directly in her eyes. She had shut her eyes immediately, but when she opened them again, she could not see anything. So, she yelled, 'Mama, I cannot see.'

Mama calmly led her by the hand to the washbasin. She soaked a soft towel in warm water, squeezed out the water and gently wiped her shut eyes with it. She did that many times with the warm towel until much of the oil had been removed from her face and eyelashes.

When Mama thought she had done enough, she said, 'Open your eyes now. How is it?' Searching with one hand in front of her, Mansa said, 'It is like scum lying on my eyes. I still cannot see clearly.' When much, much later, her eyesight began to clear, she said, 'It is still like looking through a thick haze or heavy smoke.'

Gradually the smokiness disappeared and her vision cleared. But the strange memory of not seeing properly did not go away.

Time passed and Mansa's big day came, her sixth birthday, the end of her baby years, as she had been reminded many times already. Mama, Papa, her two older brothers, Kofi and Kojo, and the aunties and uncles were there to celebrate with her. They had all brought presents which were still unopened, and she was excited. But her eyes never left

the front door. Everything had to wait until Nana Adoma arrived, and everyone assured her that Nana was on her way.

Nana was full of surprises, and Mansa could hardly wait to see what her present would be. So when a taxi stopped in front of the house, she dashed outside. She opened the car door, and Nana stepped out, saying, 'Happy Birthday my grandchild and special friend,' and they were in a tight hug. The taxi driver carried a sizeable, covered, wicker basket into the house. Strange, thought Mansa when she saw it and wondered what could be inside. Guinea pig? Rabbit? Cat? A puppy?

Her mind went into a spin. How very much she wished her eyes could see through things! Then she would be able to tell what was inside the basket. She could even know what was on the other side of walls – there would be no secrets from her, nothing hidden. Her eyes would penetrate, like hospital machines that can see broken bones through the skin. Except she would see everything in colour, not just misty black and white like the pictures of her brother Kojo's arm when he broke it in a fall.

And thinking about seeing through walls and skin, she began to wonder. Before she knew it, she was trying to bore through the side of the wicker basket with her own eyes as if they had popped out of their sockets and were stretching and extending on the tips of fleshy horns like a snail's. Then she tried peering and staring at the basket until her eyes began to feel hard and like more than just two eyes.

She seemed to be seeing more baskets than one by then. Or the one wicker basket, fragmented. And it was as if she was squeezed inside her eyeballs, with vessels and nerves pulsing and throbbing behind her, and looking out of a great window, where, when the eyelid shutters slid down for a moment, out went the entire world, everything, as if it had all gone. That is the sheer wonder of the eye. Slide up the eyelid shutters, and instantly you are all wrapped up in the world.

She began to think of other possible ways to achieve a penetrating vision. How fishes were able to see clearly through volumes of water ...

'Mansa, you've been so quiet. Won't you open your presents?'

For an instant, or perhaps longer, Mansa felt trapped within her own two eyeballs. She had to clatter out in haste – and, to get back to normal,



shed the multiple spider's eyes and the compound vision of a wasp. The disc eyes that saw clearly through billions of gallons of water. Eyes that extended and projected from the sockets on the tips of pieces of cartilage. And the calcified stick shell eyes of a crab. The snail eyes retracted into the eye sockets and the crab eyes snapped shut.

Instantly she became herself again, Mansa the birthday girl, surrounded by smiling faces. Nobody knew what had happened because nobody saw what she had tried to do. The smiling taxi driver placed the wicker basket gingerly beside the other presents, congratulated her on her birthday and walked out to his car.

Naturally, the wicker basket was the first present that Mansa approached. With Nana close beside her and all other eyes watching with interest, Mansa lifted the lid. Inside were two purple chickens!

'You can hardly see the differences now, but one is going to become a hen and the other, a cock. Soon these two will lay eggs, and you will have your own chickens to take care of, my good friend,' said Nana. Mansa stretched her hand and touched both chickens gently, feeling their fluffy down under her fingers.

She stood up and gave her grandmother a hug and said, 'Thank you, Grandmother.'

But her grandmother knew Mansa like the back of her own hands and had sensed concern in her voice. So, she said, 'Strange colour for chickens, isn't it, purple? And of course, you are worried about keeping the little ones safe. Those ravenous hawks and kites in our neighbourhood scour every inch of the ground for small prey from half a mile up with their super-sharp vision. But don't worry. They don't know little chicks can be purple, so they won't touch them.'

What was really going through Mansa's head was, 'Oh, how I would love to have eyes like those birds' eyes, to see my tiny new chickens clearly from half a mile away!'



ILLUSTRATION

# *I FOUND YOU, MOM!*

ZHOU XIANG

In traditional Chinese painting, birds and flowers are often painted within a circle shape. This circle shape is also like an eye, and love is how we see the world through the eyes of children with healthy vision.

We see love.



*I found you, Mom!*



STORY

# **LITTLE MOLE'S SONG**

DAVID OUIMET

Can you hear the tiny squeak of Little Mole's cart? Its rhythm circles like the sound of a sparrow singing 'I see you' over and over.

Little Mole sang the words above the parroting of his wheel. Between the edge of the great green lawn and the border of the afternoon, Little Mole sank into the long dark tunnels of his best friend Petri. There was barely a sound except for the echoing of, 'I see you ... I see you ... I see you' bouncing against the damp walls.

Petri had spent the whole morning arranging and rearranging for the arrival of his best friend. He brought out his finest pillows, his pile of books and a silver cup for the flower that Little Mole would always bring on each visit. When Little Mole arrived they spoke about the cooler weather, about lawns and how enjoyable light dusting can be. As with every visit, they soon sat down while Petri started to read softly from the pages of a small green book:

'People have ten to forty moles, and they can fade away and even change shape. It is important to ... know ... that a mole ... and ... and a ...'

Little Mole leaned forward.



‘Go on, please.’

‘Little Mole?’

‘Yes, Pet?’

‘I need your help, come and sit next to me.’

Petri turned the book to Little Mole:

‘I cannot see this word, it is blurry. Can you read it for me, please?’

‘Pet ... I can see it, but I don’t know how to read.’

Petri patted the head of his friend, and they both sat in silence enjoying the scent of the beautiful flower.

The next week Petri spent the whole morning arranging and rearranging for the arrival for his best friend. He brought out his finest two pillows and a silver cup, for the bright flower that Little Mole would bring on each visit, but no book.

When Little Mole arrived they placed the flowers in the silver cup and sat in silence.

‘Little Mole, can I ask you something?’

‘Yes, Pet.’

‘Do you ever feel sad?’

Little Mole shook his head from side to side.

‘No, I don’t think so ... No.’

They both sat very still, and Little Mole’s whiskers began to shake just a little bit.

‘Pet?’ He said, looking into the eyes of his friend.

‘Yes, Little Mole?’

‘It’s not true, what I said ... sometimes I ... do feel sad.’

Petri patted the head of his friend and sighed. Little Mole stayed for a bit then abruptly left, knowing exactly what he must do.

Early the next morning Little Mole tied together his beloved toothbrushes and pulled them across green lawns and tall fields, to the busy streets where a mole could make a fair trade.

Little Mole, after some time, found a shop window full of eyeglasses and chipped dishes. He untied his toothbrushes and walked through the door to a slow mole behind a dirty glass counter.

‘Hi, I’m Moe. How can I help?’

‘I’d like to trade these in for a pair of your best eyeglasses, please.’

Moe looked at the green brush, then the purple one.



‘I’ll take the purple one, but why would I need two of them?’

‘What can I get in return?’

The slow mole waddled into the back room and brought out a pair of old glasses held together with yellowing tape.

‘Try these on.’

‘Thank you, Sir.’

‘Now can you see me?’

‘I see you,’ Little Mole said, and left with his only toothbrush and a pair of broken eyeglasses.

The next week Petri was slouching on an old chair when Little Mole arrived. There was no silver cup, there were no fine pillows, and no books.

‘Pet, I brought you something.’

‘You shouldn’t have.’

‘Please, fetch a book.’

Petri, slightly confused, left for a moment and returned with the small green book. Little Mole let his friend settle back into his chair and handed him the eyeglasses.

‘These are for you, Pet.’

Little Mole leaned forward as Petri placed the glasses on his nose and opened the book.

‘Go on, Pet.’

Petri looked down at Little Mole as his whiskers began to shake just a little bit.

‘I’m so sorry. These don’t really work. It’s all still very blurry.’

They both sat in silence with neither bothering to mention that Little Mole forgot to bring a flower.

Little Mole went through everything he owned, and knew with his heart that his black leather boot was both precious and priceless, and set out in the morning through green lawns and tall fields. Little Mole entered the shop as the slow mole looked up from his book.

‘I’d like to trade this in for your finest pair of eyeglasses.’

The slow mole put down his book and inspected the boot.

‘Well what I am going to do with one shoe? I’m so sorry I can’t make a trade.’

The slow mole felt bad so he let Little Mole pick any book he chose to take home.



When he got home, Little Mole opened the book and noticed that it did not seem to be the same language as in Petri's books. The lines and marks were so pleasing that it seemed to make some sort of sense. That night, he began to teach himself to read; and day after day and night after night he fell into the spell of those black marks on the yellow paper and forgot to visit his friend Petri.

Petri became worried when Little Mole stopped visiting, and early one morning set out across yellow fields and green lawns to the hill where his friend lived; much to his surprise, he found Little Mole sitting outside with a yellow book by his side. They spoke about the warmer but rainier weather, about lawns and the merits of exercise. They both sat down in the sun, and Little Mole opened up the book and began to hum the most beautiful song that Petri had ever heard. When the song came to its end they both sat in silence. Then Petri gave his friend a pat on his head and said:

‘Go on ... again, please.’





STORY

# **A GLASS AND PLASTIC PASSPORT**

**MANUEL RAICES PEREZ-CASTAÑEDA**

At home, two days after the children's party, they realised that the girl was starting to have problems. There was no way she could catch a ball in her games, she tripped over furniture that had been moved, and when family and friends visited, she took a while to recognise them. So the minute her eyes began to look red, they did not hesitate to take her to the doctor. And in that dark environment, she could feel herself transported to a place that smelled of cleanliness, where they put her to bed and left her.

After some procedures, the doctors asked her parents for details of the new patient. Her mother said, 'Ever since she was little, our daughter's sight was not the best. Sometimes she was confused about the whereabouts of things, and especially of the small pond, in which she ended up several times. So we took her to the optician, who recommended glasses, which turned out to be her passport to sharp sight. From that moment on, we noticed she was extremely curious to understand everything related to glasses; and she became a regular at the school library, where she studied fanatically the art of making glass from the silicate mixtures so plentiful on the beaches. She got so interested that she managed to convince us to build a miniature oven, on condition that everything dangerous would be handled by us; and we

melted her first glass while we were on a family camping trip. When the experiment was over, her father looked at the result and said, in a nutshell: "This is useless!" So the next day we signed her up for a glass-making club.'

The specialists interrupted. This wasn't the detail they were looking for: they needed to know if the patient had allergies or previous illnesses.

The mother apologised and gave the relevant information, completing the admittance procedure. Then the parents were told they could not stay in the hospital: their daughter needed to be isolated, though constant contact with them would be maintained. And they withdrew.

In the ward, the girl could feel how the position of her pillow was adjusted, and, though she was resigned, missed her little glasses, and thought back to her first meeting with the director of the workshop, and the things he talked about that she had not known.

There she learned that the first glass was made in Syria about five thousand years ago. That the sage Alhacen, who lived around 995-1040 AD, was the first to suggest that these crystals, if they were well polished, could be used to magnify things seen through them, so they were called 'reading stones'. In about 1240, Italian monks, whose job was to write books by hand, used these stones to go on with their meticulous work as scribes into old age, in spite of their loss of vision. And she thought about the precursors of current eyeglasses, which originated in 1300 when lenses began to be used in pairs, one for each eye, and how they become more versatile centuries later thanks to Benjamin Franklin who created bifocals, to which were added progressive lenses, invented in 1959 by the young French engineer Bernard Maitenaz who improved near, intermediate and distance vision with a single piece of glass.

Her thoughts were interrupted when someone adjusting her arm commented on a situation far away that was already spreading to other countries. She tried to sleep, but was alert again when another voice in the room mentioned the word 'lenses' and how, through them, they had observed the agent causing the problem; and had shared the images with the world, so that everyone could see the structure of the evil entity that was loose.

While they were taking her temperature, they talked about the intruder again, and she heard that it was a virus, considered the simplest of living things, part of the micro world in which everything was tiny, and nothing could be seen except through microscopes. This one in particular entered its victims through the eyes, proliferating until it caused blindness which lasted as long as the infection did. Seen in photographs, viruses did not inspire fear; quite the contrary, since they seemed no more than insignificant particles. However, if they managed to enter a new victim by penetrating the cell tissue, they duplicated millions of times, generating enormous chaos.

The girl tried to imagine how small those contagious structures could be and was unable to, so she resolved to find out more later from books. She sank into a heavy doze, then into sleep, but her dream did not last long; the touch of a hand on her cheek woke her. Curious, she half-opened her eyes and, with difficulty, recognised the silhouette. It was the master glassmaker, her teacher at the club! She sat up abruptly in the bed and declared miserably:

‘I can hardly see with this disease.’

‘But I have a surprise for you’, he said, and took out some little glasses that he placed in her hands.

She gripped them tightly, asking if they were her prescription.

‘Try them out for yourself,’ replied the glassmaker. ‘They are special lenses to “see beyond things”.’

‘Special lenses? What is special about them?’

‘They amplify the good feelings of those who see through them. I want you to be the first to use them. The extraordinary thing is that they are sensitive to the pain of others. Because they were melted down from sands taken from war zones and the sites of environmental disasters, moistened by the tears of those who had to flee.’

The girl cleaned her lenses, but as soon as she put them on she began to shrink. She tried to talk to the glassmaker, but he was as tall as a television tower and she soon lost sight of him along with the rest of her surroundings. Looking for something around her she might recognise, she found herself standing in front of what looked like a city, made up of

small, crowded, cell-like structures, like houses built on a hill. Each cell was neat and covered in bulges acting as doors and windows, exits and entrances. Long protuberances contained tubes of all diameters transporting liquids at great speed through the spaces in between.

Oval structures emerged from these hoses from time to time, like courier carts making deliveries or collecting things from each of the houses. The girl realised that these exchanges were not random since the same doors or windows were always used, depending on the type of exchange being made. Taking advantage of the fact that the door of one of the cells was open, she went inside to try and talk to the owner.

‘Hello, is anyone there?’ she asked.

‘There’s always someone here. What have you come to bring, or what do you intend to take?’ said the voice.

‘I can’t see anyone. Again, is there anyone in the house?’ called the girl.

‘It isn’t a house, and yes, of course there’s someone, and that someone is me.’ The voice came from above.

The girl looked up and saw to her surprise that it was the house itself, or rather the cell, that was answering her. She heard deafening noises, not quite like thunder but more like sneezing, that preceded the appearance of a figure, stranger than anything strange she had ever seen before. The visitor was approaching the cells at high speed, depositing a tiny copy of itself in each, with chronometric precision and always using a specific protuberance.

Something made the sick girl think that it was an emergency. And it seemed she was right, because as soon as the little houses picked up the signals transmitted by “the outsider”, they began to take protective measures, closing as many of their doors and windows as possible.

The girl, instead of feeling fear, perceived that the glasses were prompting her to act. She realised which entrances were the most strategic points to defend, so, using the sterile napkins with which she cleaned her eyes, she made corkscrews with them and used them to cover exposed openings. This timely action interrupted the flow of intruders into the cells.

Sometime later, when the assault had ceased, a prick-like pain made her open her eyes. The city had disappeared and so had the master glassmaker. She was still lying on a bed, curtained off inside the air-conditioned room. Despite her blurred vision, she could see that she had a tube in one of the veins of her forearm, to introduce a medicine, under the supervision of three silhouettes dressed so that they looked like astronauts. When the pain made her cry, they tried to calm her down.

‘Forgive us for interrupting your dream, but it was necessary.’

‘How do you know I was dreaming?’ she whispered.

‘Because you didn’t stop talking in your sleep, about your glasses, about cells to protect, about concentrating on the entrances to be blocked ... It was a bad dream, wasn’t it?’

Somewhat emboldened, she recounted her dream until one of the experts withdrew the needle from her arm and ordered the rest of the specialists to leave. Outside, he suggested that the patient’s dream could offer an alternative therapy that they had not yet thought of. And he proposed synthesising a molecule that would block the specific receptor through which the virus coupled to cells, preventing it from entering and making it more vulnerable. If the proposal was successful, the virus would remain in the blood, which would carry it to the kidney, from where it would leave the body through the urine.

And they got down to work and developed a protocol with all possible details, taking it to the scientific council for consultation. Due to the epidemic, authorisations were quick, allowing the new therapy to be evaluated in an experimental clinical trial, with successful results. This made it easier for the girl to heal, ending her hospital stay. As she entered the ambulance which would take her home, while hospital staff applauded, she realised that in her dream, solidarity with the pain of others had helped her improve things.

The specialists decided to make the girl’s story public, so that other countries could benefit their patients. Days later, from different parts of the planet, others joined the initiative, so, increasingly, new options for therapies began to be shared, which, when brought together, ended the epidemic earlier than expected.

Scientists estimated that five million patients exposed to the virus had recovered their vision, but when sight tests were done in bulk to confirm the cures, the investigation showed that 2.5 billion people, a figure five hundred times the value of those exposed to the pathogen, still could not see well.

Some suspected the presence of new viruses, so all kinds of rumours began to spread, especially on social media, until experts made a categorical statement:

‘There is no virus capable of affecting 2.5 billion people at the same time; the drawback is something else: it is the unavailability of glasses causing this global problem. Increase the ability to measure people’s eyesight, increase the facilities to build glasses, expand their distribution channels and the problem will disappear.’

And the truth, put like this, revealed an unresolved problem. In the 21st century, who would have thought that an aid that began to be used 700 years ago would not be available to everyone? So many big-hearted people dedicated enormous efforts to try to change this, and the campaign grew so it reached around the world, and even a summit was organised, which was attended by politicians, who gave countless speeches and generated hundreds of proposals. Although none were approved, sometimes due to lack of consensus and other times due to last-minute vetoes.

And everything would have continued like this, if it were not for the girl, who, now she was cured, returned to her classes in the glass workshop where we must assume that she told her dream, because in a few days, the lens factory replaced its raw materials with others made of sands extracted from bullrings, demolished schools, refugee camps, forest fires and other places that were exceptional at absorbing pain.

The workshop speeded up its production, in order to respond to an urgent request for glasses for officials of the World Parliamentary Union, who would wear them during their visits to hospitals associated with the eradication of the virus.

The commitment was fulfilled, so that hundreds of eyeglasses, whose lenses had been made from the special sands, could be sent on time and by diplomatic bag to their final destinations.

What came next will always be a mystery. In a short time, politics underwent a sudden change, involving less talk and more action. Making glasses became an attractive profession, more valued than being a footballer. The eyeglass industries multiplied everywhere, as did the construction of schools, so that sight and instruction became inseparable; and, since all things pass, the day came when each person in need of glasses could access them, without it being unusual.

When millions began to see correctly, works of good multiplied, stealing so much territory from inaction that epidemics, wars, environmental contamination, intolerance of differences and animal abuse, began to gradually blur until they disappeared.

In this new context, the girl had become a young engineer who graduated as an optics specialist and had just been appointed head of procedure. The first day in her new position, picking up her notebook, the date made her remember. It was sixteen years since her hospital admission! Leaning back, she removed excess moisture from her eyes and, readjusting her glasses, began to review the flow of tasks in the eyewear workshop. From her own experience she knew that two crystals attached to a frame centimetres from the eyes, meant a glass and plastic passport to a better world.







ILLUSTRATION

# ***THE MAGICAL RIGHT***

HUANG LI

Children are naturally curious about their world and enjoy exploring their surroundings. Once we give all children who need them a pair of glasses, all children will gain the magical right to explore and wonder like others.





POEM

# *UNDER THE RED SHAWL*

VIKKI CONLEY

Everyone was fleeing town on the day that I was born.  
Mama folded me into her shawl and started walking amid the  
dust and colour.

I heard the boom, boom, boom of her heart.

When the dust stung my eyes and throat, Mama wrapped me like  
a cocoon.

The sun danced through the red weave, lulling me to sleep.

Donkey's lips hung loose with thirst. His head and ears drooped  
as low as they could go.

Eventually Mama spread her shawl across the dry earth.

'We'll rest here,' she said.

As we climbed higher, the snow nipped my nose.

The world below was as small as sticks and stones.

But we climbed up and over, until that world disappeared.

When we arrived at 'who-knows-where', Mama took off her shawl.  
It rested over us like a tired blanket. Its edges were frayed and split.  
Each night, I lay warm in her arms until the sun again rippled  
over the earth.

When the days were long, I'd play with shadows and light.  
The shawl, stretched wide between two sticks, became our puppet stage.  
Monkeys chased lions across the red screen. Their shadows danced  
and hopped.

When the days were hot, we'd make trucks and balls.  
Under the shade of the shawl, Mama shaped clay with her hands.  
Twigs joined wheels to a cube. She rolled the toy over my dusty toes.  
'Brrm, brrm,' she said.

We wrapped plastic bags, one over the other, until they grew into a ball.  
Then we kicked and kicked until the mountains swallowed the sun.

But it was the 'giddy-up game' that Mama reminds me of most.  
Because it rode us all the way to Zada's door.  
She opened her door.  
She offered us tea.

As the snow began to fall once again, Mama's shawl only reached so far.  
My legs poked out. They shivered in the night air.

But Zada helped Mama make a warmer shawl ...  
... and then another, and another, and another.  
Mama hummed to the click of Zada's sewing machine.  
I hummed too. We all hummed together.

Zada also gave me a gift.  
It was something I'd never seen before.  
I flicked the pages. She pointed to the letters.  
I copied her sounds. Mama did too.  
Then I wrapped the treasure, like my own baby, in the red shawl...  
...and carried it back to where everyone could hear.  
I said those sounds over and over, sitting under the red shawl...  
...until everyone knew them too.



STORY

# *DANCING WITH JOY*

NANDANA SEN

ILLUSTRATION BY SANDHYA PRABHAT

‘I can’t do it.’

I’m standing at the edge of the pool, staring at the blueness congealed below like a block of coloured concrete.

‘Yes, you can,’ says Zakir, like he always does. My brother is nothing if not optimistic. ‘You swim perfectly well now, Aloo.’

Easy for him to say. Zak has won the Swimming Federation Championship three years in a row. He’s a rare nerd who’s also a jock, which makes him a huge heartthrob at school, though he’s way more interested in books and sports than girls. Did I mention he’s our star batsman, and he scored a perfect 2400 in his SATs? Yup, that’s Zakir for you. I should hate him, right?

‘But what if I drown?’ I squeak, my eyes fixated on the bottomless blue below. ‘That will be seriously tragic as I won’t get to show my new bangs to Rhea. Or go on our trip to Disney World!’ My voice quavers.

‘Drama Queen!’ laughs Zak. ‘Come on, Aliya. Take a deep breath and jump!’

'What if I bash my face and get so bruised that nobody asks me to the Summer Social?'

Truth be told, I'm not thinking of 'nobody'. I am thinking of Joy. I'd seen him around in school for years, but it was only this spring, once I got my first set of glasses, that Joy started looking completely different to me. I crashed headlong into this massive crush when I caught him diving at our club during Open Swim. Joy was in flight, soaring through the twilight sky like a very special bird, fluttering his biceps rather than wings. Just as he touched water, my heart sprang up into the sky with a great big splash. So, I signed up for extra swimming lessons, hoping I'd impress him one day. Joy isn't a star student, but he's a mean-ass bowler on the pitch. He has the deepest dimples, and he brings extra chapatis every day to feed the street dogs around school.

'I will bash you myself unless you stop being such an annoying little princess,' Zak rolls his eyes. 'Disney World this, Summer Dance that!'

Just so you know, Zak is the gentlest soul on earth. The image of him bashing anyone is so absurd that I have to smile. I shoot a quick glance around the pool, making sure that Joy isn't there to witness my moment of un-glory with his unsettlingly beautiful eyes. Joy's lashes always look infinite, like the distance between me and the water.

'Aloo!' yells Zakir. 'I know you can do it. Just say yes!'

And I do.

And Zak is right, as always. I don't die or split my skull open. I silently thank Allah for making sure that Joy didn't see my ungainly splash, nor my prolonged terror before it. And for having a super-bro like Zak. Honestly, I don't know how I'll manage when he goes off to Princeton this fall.

'I still can't believe you're starting college so soon, right after Disney World,' I tell Zak as we walk back home. I stop to take a selfie and WhatsApp it to Rhea.

'And I still can't believe we're going to Disney World,' laughs Zakir. 'How did you ever get Dad to agree? You'd expect a high court judge to be more sensible, wouldn't you?'



Frankly, I'd been surprised by that too. Don't get me wrong – our Dad isn't a toughie like some dads are. In fact, he's known for being one of the more lenient judges in Hyderabad. But unlike Ammi, Dad isn't into amusement parks. He doesn't amuse easy, our Dad.

So, this is how I scored Disney World: I caught Dad at a weak moment. When I told him I failed biology, he slammed his teacup down so hard – the delicate china one I'd got him for Eid – that it shattered to bits. I burst into tears. And Dad started looking guilty.





‘How will you become a doctor if you fail bio, Aliya?’ Dad had sighed in that half conciliatory, half I’m-still-upset voice of his.

‘But I want to be an actor!’ I’d bawled. Dad looked like he wanted to break the teapot too (and possibly the milk jug) but caught himself just in time.

‘Listen, no daughter of mine will ever be an actress.’ The vein on Dad’s temple had started to throb. ‘Being a doctor is a very proper thing for a young lady from this family. Just like your mother. You’ll take biology lessons all summer long ...’

'But you know we've been wanting to go to Disney World this summer!' I'd wailed. 'And Khala keeps asking us all to visit Miami, which is so close!'

'That's true, Azhar,' Ammi had chimed in from her desk in the study. God bless Ammi.

As I race Zakir up the stairs, I wonder what Joy is doing right this minute. I really hope he asks me to the Summer Social, but I haven't admitted this to Zak yet. My brother and I talk about practically everything, but I've noticed that he isn't interested in the topic of Joy at all. The night I saw Joy fly, I'd asked Zak what Joy was like in school. 'He's all right,' Zak had mumbled, noisily switching on his 27" iMac.

Joy and Zak are in the same class and on the cricket team too, so I'm not sure why they aren't friends. Perhaps it's the competitive streak in Zakir? Unlike me, he has never flunked any subject. In fact, the only thing he miserably fails in is to not top his class every year. Zak has to be best at everything, and Joy is, after all, the other star on the cricket team. He's the trickiest spin bowler in high-school cricket, much envied for his wrist speed. I'm sure Joy is stiff competition in terms of the attention he gets. So, when Zakir saw me chatting with Joy outside the library last week, he asked me rather curtly what that was all about.

PING! WhatsApp from Rhea: 'Ur hair looks funny esp that wet mess stickin 2 ur forhd. Did J ask u 2 the dnc?'

'He wasn't at the pool 2dy,' I text back, gutted that she doesn't like my new haircut.

'Okk gotta go good luck w SAT prep.' Rhea vanishes from my phone.

Ah, yes, SAT prep. I bring out my book with ten practice tests. Unlike Zak, I'm not remotely fussed about a perfect score, but I do want to get into Brandeis, which has a good theatre-arts programme and decent financial aid. SAT maths wasn't too bad, but the language stuff was hard even for me, although I keep hearing that my vocab is fab. Joy was most impressed yesterday when I used the word 'amorous' while explaining why I wasn't allowed to watch Game of Thrones. Then we spent an hour comparing notes on our favourite movie love-confessions.

I just can't stop thinking about Joy. I switch on the TV, craving something age-appropriately 'amorous'. The thing is, there are hardly any love

stories you'll find here that could actually happen to teenagers like me. I mean, the stuff you see on film or TV has nothing to do with the way we fall in love. For one thing, everyone looks so incredibly perfect, and for another, their dramas are so incredibly pat (and colour-coordinated) they make you want to barf.

End credits roll for *Hunger Games: Catching Fire*. Shoot, missed it! I flip through channels, forgetting the SAT.

An endless stream of soaps, frothing with wives and mistresses wielding heavy jewellery and heavier makeup while they cook, clean and conspire against each other.

A film with three old men dressed like teenagers chasing girls just a bit older than me. Yuck.

An action film in which dizzying stunts are intercut with a blue-eyed beauty queen clasping a gleaming pistol to her heart like it's the love of her life.

A dance contest packed with little girls mouthing love songs with exaggerated expressions while weirdly gyrating their little hips and flat chests, looking like stunted Bollywood divas.

A news report of an acid attack on a schoolgirl by a spurned classmate, which has left her blind in one eye. My God, how utterly horrifying ...

'So, how's that test coming along?' Zak breezes in bearing chilli cheese toasts. Did I tell you that he's simply wow in the kitchen, especially for a 17-year-old lad? Whenever Ma works late in hospital, he fixes us a properly delicious snack.

'Ugh,' I groan, staring at the first of ten tests. 'I'll never finish these before we leave for Florida. I can't do it.'

'Yes, you can,' declares Zak as always, with full confidence. He switches the TV off.

'How? Look at all these words I have to memorise that no one ever uses! "Pulchritude"? "Obfuscate"? "Unimpeachable"? Who talks like that anyway?'

'Where are those flashcards you made? Let me quiz you with those.'

'Don't bother. I'm sure I don't remember any of them.'

'Oh Aloo,' Zakir sounds exasperated. 'I bet you do. Just say yes!'

And I do.

And again, Zak is right. Once he proves that I even remember what 'dissembling' and 'pernickety' mean, Zak goes back downstairs. My thoughts immediately return to Joy, of course. I can't be absolutely sure that he'll ask me to the Social, but I do know that I'm the only girl he spends any time with, so he must like me a bit. And I've had some very encouraging signs. For example, he always hangs around the club when we're there and insists on walking me home from the library. Even when we run out of things to say, Joy tries hard to keep the conversation going by asking fully random questions like, 'So, what's Zakir up to these days?' Joy has never been a sparkling conversationalist, but he's a good-hearted hunk who sets my heart off on a marathon every time he looks at me through those scandalously long lashes.

In fact, it feels weird that I haven't seen Joy at all today though I've been thinking about him nonstop. I get this uncontrollable urge to see his dimply smile. How I wish I'd taken a selfie with him yesterday! Wait, doesn't Zakir have photos of his cricket team stacked away somewhere? I look through his desk. No luck. They're not on his shelf either. Hmm ... Zak couldn't have tossed those photos, he's crazy about his team! Could they be in his Box of Special Things? The one he keeps next to his bed?

The box has no latch. Zak's journal, which I don't touch, fills up most of it. I find a picture of me as a baby, with toddler Zak bottle-feeding me. A fish fossil we'd found together on Kovalam beach. And – yes! – those cricket photos, carefully wrapped up in red tissue! Joy sparkles in all of them, of course. For nothing in the world could ever obfuscate his unimpeachable pulchritude – I giggle to myself.

God, I'll miss Joy so much on our trip. Will he still like me when I get back? And what if I forget how to swim while I'm gone? That would be a catastrophe! Maybe our hotel has a pool I could practise in?

I run downstairs to ask Zak. He has no idea. We find Dad in the study, watching the news.

'Dad, does our Disney World hotel have a pool?'

'We may not be going to Disney World, Aliya.'

What? I'm devastated to hear this, and Zak looks startled too. I mean, everything about this trip has been perfectly planned for ages!

'It's not safe,' Dad explains. 'At least 40 people were shot dead in Orlando early this morning. Probably more. They're still counting.'

'What happened?' I whisper.

'A madman. I'd rather not talk about it ... But then again, it'll be all over your social media.'

'Who were they, Dad?' asks Zak. 'Where were they, so early in the morning?'

'So late at night is more like it. In a nightclub. They were men, mostly. Young men. Gruesome affair.'

More than 40 shot dead, just like that? It didn't make any sense!

'Why were they shot?' I ask. 'What were they doing?'

'The men were – well – dancing with one another, I suppose,' Dad clears his throat awkwardly. 'Of course it's uncomfortable to think about such a weird scenario sitting here, but at least in India our boys are not marrying each other, like they do in the States.'

Zak stares at Dad, cheese toast frozen in his hand.

'Still, this shooting is very sad,' Dad sits up straight. 'Even those people have a right to live, of course.'

'I think ... I think everyone should have the right to marry who they want,' Zak says slowly.

'Do you, now? You think they should be allowed to marry and have children?' That vein on Dad's temple starts to throb. 'Men with men, women with women? Just like normal people?'

'I'm sure they were normal people, Dad. Those 40 who were killed today.' Zak's voice is shaking but he looks Dad straight in the eye.

'Don't argue with me, Zakir!' Dad bangs the remote down on the coffee table. 'You know I oppose violence of any kind, and what happened today is tragic. That aside, marriage is a sacred union, and parenthood ...'

As if by divine intervention, the doorbell rings at that moment. 'Zakir!' I yell, interrupting Dad for once. 'We have to get the door!' I drag Zak as far away from the study as I can. Dad pumps up the TV volume, like he always does when he's mad.

Joy stands on the doorstep. Judging by the way Joy's face lights up when he sees us, he hasn't heard the Orlando news yet.

'Sorry I couldn't make it to Open Swim today. So I thought I'd stop by to ... well ... to ask about the Summer Social.'

There it is, finally! The moment I've been waiting for. My hand shoots up to smooth my half-wet bangs down. Joy steps in gingerly as he speaks.

'I was wondering if ... if you'd like to come with me to the dance ... Zakir?'

Zak's mouth falls open. Literally.

So does mine.

Joy keeps speaking, shy but kind of awesomely fearless.

'I know you're going away to college soon, but I've ... I've always liked you, you see ...'

Zak's mouth closes itself, but his eyes fill up with tears.

Oh my god. How could I have been so blind? Everything moves into focus, finally.

Why Zak has never had a girlfriend.

Why Joy joined the swim club.

Why Zak feels so awkward talking about Joy.

Why Joy insists on walking me back all the way to my doorstep.

Why Zak keeps Joy's photos in his Box of Special Things.

I'd got it so wrong. It's not that Zakir and Joy don't like each other. They like each other too much to be buddies.

Zak stares at Joy, eyes still brimming, unable to utter a word. He swallows hard as Joy speaks.

'So ... I thought I should just ... well ... ask if maybe we could go to this Social together?'

'I ... I can't ... Joy ... ' Zak begins to speak, his voice trapped in tears.

'Yes, you can,' I hear myself say, not letting him finish.

I've never seen Zakir like this before, all trembly and confused. I'm the emotional one, not Zak, so we've always been told. But I've nursed my crush for just a few weeks. Zak has hidden his for years.

'Zak' I whisper. 'Just say yes.'

And he does.



STORY

# *THE EYES HAVE IT*

RUSKIN BOND

I had the train compartment to myself up to Rohana, then a girl got in. The couple who saw her off were probably her parents; they seemed very anxious about her comfort, and the woman gave the girl detailed instructions as to where to keep her things, when not to lean out of windows and how to avoid speaking to strangers.

They called their goodbyes, and the train pulled out of the station. As I was totally blind at the time, my eyes sensitive only to light and darkness, I was unable to tell what the girl looked like; but I knew she wore slippers from the way they slapped against her heels.

It would take me some time to discover something about her looks, and perhaps I never would. But I liked the sound of her voice and even the sound of her slippers.

'Are you going all the way to Dehra?' I asked.

I must have been sitting in a dark corner because my voice startled her. She gave a little exclamation and said, 'I didn't know anyone else was here.'



Well, it often happens that people with good eyesight fail to see what is right in front of them. They have too much to take in, I suppose. Whereas people who cannot see (or see very little) have to take in only the essentials, whatever registers most tellingly on their remaining senses.

'I didn't see you either,' I said. 'But I heard you come in.'

I wondered if I would be able to prevent her from discovering that I was blind. Provided I keep to my seat, I thought, it shouldn't be too difficult.

The girl said, 'I'm getting off at Saharanpur. My aunt is meeting me there.'

'Then I had better not get too familiar,' I replied. 'Aunts are usually formidable creatures.'

'Where are you going?' she asked.

'To Dehra and then to Mussoorie.'

'Oh, how lucky you are. I wish I were going to Mussoorie. I love the hills, especially in October.'

'Yes, this is the best time,' I said, calling on my memories. 'The hills are covered with wild dahlias, the sun is delicious, and at night you can sit in front of a log fire and drink a little brandy. Most of the tourists have gone, and the roads are quiet and almost deserted. Yes, October is the best time.'

She was silent. I wondered if my words had touched her, or whether she thought me a romantic fool. Then I made a mistake.

'What is it like outside?' I asked.

She seemed to find nothing strange in the question. Had she noticed already that I could not see? But her next question removed my doubts.

'Why don't you look out of the window?' she asked.

I moved easily along the berth and felt for the window ledge. The window was open, and I faced it, making a pretence of studying the landscape. I heard the panting of the engine, the rumble of the wheels, and, in my mind's eye, I could see telegraph posts flashing by.

‘Have you noticed,’ I ventured, ‘that the trees seem to be moving while we seem to be standing still?’

‘That always happens,’ she said. ‘Do you see any animals?’

‘No,’ I answered quite confidently. I knew that there were hardly any animals left in the forests near Dehra.

I turned from the window and faced the girl, and for a while we sat in silence.

‘You have an interesting face,’ I remarked. I was becoming quite daring, but it was a safe remark. Few girls can resist flattery. She laughed pleasantly – a clear, ringing laugh.

‘It’s nice to be told I have an interesting face. I’m tired of people telling me I have a pretty face.’

Oh, so you do have a pretty face, I thought, and aloud I said: ‘Well, an interesting face can also be pretty.’

‘You are a very gallant young man,’ she said. ‘But why are you so serious?’

I thought, then, I would try to laugh for her, but the thought of laughter only made me feel troubled and lonely.

‘We’ll soon be at your station,’ I said.

‘Thank goodness it’s a short journey. I can’t bear to sit in a train for more than two or three hours.’

Yet I was prepared to sit there for almost any length of time, just to listen to her talking. Her voice had the sparkle of a mountain stream. As soon as she left the train, she would forget our brief encounter; but it would stay with me for the rest of the journey, and for some time after.

The engine’s whistle shrieked, the carriage wheels changed their sound and rhythm. The girl got up and began to collect her things. I wondered if she wore her hair in a bun, or if it was plaited; perhaps it was hanging loose over her shoulders, or was it cut very short?

The train drew slowly into the station. Outside there was the shouting of porters and vendors and a high-pitched female voice near the carriage door; that voice must have belonged to the girl's aunt.

'Goodbye,' the girl said.

She was standing very close to me. So close that the perfume from her hair was tantalising. I wanted to raise my hand and touch her hair, but she moved away. Only the scent of perfume still lingered where she had stood.

There was some confusion in the doorway. A man, getting into the compartment, stammered an apology. Then the door banged, and the world was shut out again. I returned to my berth. The guard blew his whistle, and we moved off. Once again, I had a game to play and a new fellow-traveller.

The train gathered speed, the wheels took up their song, the carriage groaned and shook. I found the window and sat in front of it, staring into the daylight that was darkness for me.

So many things were happening outside the window; it could be a fascinating game, guessing what went on out there.

The man who had entered the compartment broke into my reverie.

'You must be disappointed,' he said. 'I'm not nearly as attractive a travelling companion as the one who just left.'

'She was an interesting girl,' I said. 'Can you tell me – did she keep her hair long or short?'

'I don't remember,' he said, sounding puzzled. 'It was her eyes I noticed, not her hair. She had beautiful eyes – but they were of no use to her. She was completely blind. Didn't you notice?'



STORY

# ***EXTRACT FROM 'COOL!'***

**MICHAEL MORPURGO**

Sometimes I tell myself that maybe I'm in the middle of a bad dream, a terrible nightmare, that soon I'll wake up and Lucky will be alive and everything will be just as it was. But dreams and nightmares only end when you wake up, and I can't wake up. I try. I try all the time, but I can't. So then I know it can't be a dream, that what happened to me and to Lucky was real and true, that Lucky is dead, and I'm locked inside my head and can't get out.

I can't wake up. But I *can* hear. I can feel, too. I can smell. And I can remember.

And another thing. How long have I been lying here in this bed? The trouble is there's no night or day for me, no yesterday, no today, no tomorrow; so it's difficult to know how long I've been here. I'm guessing it's about three days, maybe four. But I can't really be sure.

I doze a lot, but I never know for how long. I feel like dozing off right now. I'm so sleepy. When I wake up Mum'll still be here, with Ellie, and with Gran probably – Gran's just gone off shopping. Or maybe Dad'll be here

instead, or Doctor Smellybreath will be sticking something into me or pulling something out of me. Or Tracey will be with me again, making me comfortable. She's my nurse, and she's really cool. She smells nice too. Not like Doctor Smellybreath. He smells of garlic.

I always feel better when Tracey's around. From her voice I've made up a picture of her in my head. She's about thirty and she sounds very pretty. She's tall, I reckon, and she's got dark hair. And she has a nose ring. I don't know why, but I'm sure she's got a nose ring. I'll see for myself one day, see how right or wrong I was. Not that it matters. She's cool, anyway.

\*

Dad's here. He comes most days, but never with Mum. They don't do anything together any more, not since he moved out. He's reading to me. *The BFG* again. It's always *The BFG*. I like it, but not that much. I know why he's doing it though. Doctor Smellybreath's always saying it, to everyone who comes to visit me. He says anything could wake me up at any time – a voice I recognise, a book I know, a song I like, or some big surprise. He says everyone's got to try to find a way through to me, and one of the best ways is by jogging my memory.

\*

I'm not giving up, Mum. It's you lot that's giving up, not me. I'm still here. I can feel you. As long as I can feel you, I'm alive. I'm sending you my mind-mail messages all the time, but you're just not listening. No one's listening any more, no one's hearing, not even Tracey.

Then Dad's getting up. 'I won't be long, Robbie. The sun's streaming through the window. Bit stuffy in here. I've got to get some fresh air'.

When he's gone, Mum cries quietly and holds my hand. Then she says, 'Still, there's one good thing that's come out of all this, Robbie. At least you've stopped biting your nails.' She's laughing. That's better, Mum. I love to hear you laughing.

'If you wake up, Robbie, there's so many things I'll never tell you off for again. I promise. I'll never say, stop biting your nails, Robbie. I'll never say, tidy your room, Robbie. I'll never say, turn off the TV. And I'll never say, stop saying "cool". *Promise.*'

I want so much to go on listening to her because I can hear she's smiling as she's talking, and I love to hear her smiling. But I can't stay awake. I'm feeling so heavy inside, so warm. I'm falling away from her into my sleep. I can't stop myself. I can't feel her hand anymore. I can't hear her voice. I try to come back to her, but I can't. I hope she'll be there when I wake up. I hope I will wake up.



# CONTRIBUTOR BIOGRAPHIES

## **NICOLETTE JONES**

Nicolette Jones is a prize-winning writer and has been the children's books reviewer of the Sunday Times for more than two decades. She was a nominee for the Eleanor Farjeon Award for outstanding service to the world of children's books, is an experienced chair (and programmer) of public events and has been a judge of many adults' and children's book awards. She is an active supporter of Empathy Lab UK and Authors4Oceans.

## **JON AGEE**

Jon Agee is an American author and illustrator of many acclaimed picture books including *Terrific*, *Milo's Hat Trick*, *Little Santa*, *It's Only Stanley*, *Lion Lessons*, *Life on Mars* and *The Wall in the Middle of the Book*. He lives in San Francisco, California.

## **SILVIA ARAZI**

Silvia Arazi is an Argentinian writer and singer. Her book *How Early the Night Falls* won the Julio Cortázar Short Story Award. She published a volume of poetry, *Claudine* and *The Stone House*, and *The Boundary: A haiku novella* which won second prize from the National Endowment for the Arts. Her novels *The Singing Teacher* and *The Separation* were published in several languages. For children's audiences, she has published *The Family Cubierto*, *The Boy of Few Words*, *The Lives of Cats* (including her own songs to sing with a boy or a cat) and *The Girl of Few Words*.

## **MESHACK ASARE**

Meshack Asare is a popular African children's author. Asare has won many prestigious national and international awards as a writer and illustrator of books for children and young adults and is widely acclaimed for his skilful weaving of cultural traditions into storybooks for children. He was born in Ghana and currently resides in Degenfeld, Germany.

## **DAVID BADDIEL**

David Baddiel is a British comedian, novelist and television presenter. Besides comedy, Baddiel is also a published novelist and a screenwriter who is the author of children's novels *The Parent Agency*, *The Person Controller*, *AniMalcolm*, *Birthday Boy*, *Head Kid* and *The Taylor TurboChaser* and has previously written four critically-acclaimed adult novels.

## **DOLPH BANZA**

Dolph Banza is an illustrator and graphic designer from Kigali, Rwanda. Much of his work is in designing children's illustrations and comic books for behaviour change communication.

## **QUENTIN BLAKE**

Quentin Blake is probably the best known English illustrator and has an international reputation. He is famous for his illustrations for books by Roald Dahl, as well as books by Michael Rosen, Joan Aiken, John Yeoman and Russell Hoban. He has illustrated for the Folio Society, Hoban's post-



apocalyptic novel Riddley Walker as well as books by Victor Hugo, Voltaire, Cyrano de Bergerac and Cervantes. He was awarded the international Hans Christian Andersen Award in 2002, and from 1999 to 2001 he was the first British Children's Laureate. The Quentin Blake Centre for Illustration in Islington is due to open its doors in autumn 2022.

### **RUSKIN BOND**

Ruskin Bond is an Indian author of British descent. He is considered an icon among Indian writers and children's authors. He wrote his first novel, *The Room on the Roof*, when he was 17, which won the Llewellyn Rhys Memorial Prize in 1957. In 1992 he was awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award, the Padma Shri in 1999 and the Padma Bhushan in 2014. The Indian Council for Child Education has recognised his role in the growth of children's literature and literacy in India.

### **VIKKI CONLEY**

Vikki Conley is an Australian author, content creator and intrepid adventurer. She has worked as a professional writer and marketer, with diverse communities across three continents for over 20 years. Conley is an active player in both the arts and literary industries. She has negotiated multiple community collaborations that have child-focused, multi-artform experiences and social outcomes. She has won a number of awards for her children's stories and poetry.

### **LAUREN CHILD**

Lauren Child MBE is an award-winning English children's author and illustrator. She is known for her book series, such as the Charlie and Lola picture books, the Clarice Bean series and the Ruby Redfort novel series. In 2008 she was announced as UNESCO's Artist for Peace. In 2010 she was awarded an MBE for her services to literature and was named the Children's Laureate for 2017–2019.

### **CRESSIDA COWELL**

Cressida Cowell is a British children's author-illustrator, popularly known for the book series *How to Train Your Dragon*. Cressida is a trustee of World Book Day, a patron of Read for Good, and an ambassador for the National Literacy Trust and the Woodland Trust. She has won the Ruth Rendell Award for championing literacy and the Hay Festival Medal for Fiction. She is an honorary fellow of Keble College, Oxford and has an honorary doctorate from the University of Brighton. Cressida is also the current Waterstones Children's Laureate.

### **JENNY KAY DUPUIS**

Dr Jenny Kay Dupuis is an educator, writer and artist who works to support the advancement of Indigenous education. She is of Anishinaabe (Ojibway) ancestry and a proud member of Nipissing First Nation. Jenny's interest in her family's past and her commitment to teaching about Indigenous realities through literature drew her to co-write *I am Not a Number*, her first children's book. She lives in Toronto.

### **CAROLINE DUSABE**

Caroline Dusabe is an author and global expert on early childhood development (ECD) at Save the Children in Rwanda. With 12 years of experience in the fields of early childhood care and development, education, media and publishing, she is able to support a number of offices, mainly in Africa on ECD within large book development programmes.

### **NICK EAST**

Nick East is the illustrator of the bestselling *Toto the Ninja Cat* as well as the *Goodnight Digger* and *Knock Knock* series. He worked for many years as a museum designer but has always been a storyteller, whether as a child, filling sketchbooks with quirky characters, or as a designer displaying a collection of ancient artefacts. Nick lives near York, England with his wife and two children.

### **FRANCES HARDINGE**

Frances Hardinge is a British children's writer. Her debut novel, *Fly by Night*, met huge critical acclaim and won the 2006 Branford Boase Award and was listed as one of the School Library Journal Best Books. She has since written many highly acclaimed children's novels including *Twilight Robbery*, as well as the Carnegie shortlisted *Cuckoo Song* and the 2015 Costa Book of the Year winner, *The Lie Tree*.

### **RANDA HADDADIN**

Randa Haddadin is a Russian-Jordanian visual artist, illustrator and architect. Her work is a visual diary: her everyday thoughts, observations and celebration of that which surrounds her. She currently lives in Dubai.

### **CANDY GOURLAY**

Candy Gourlay was a journalist during the People Power Revolution in her native Philippines but now lives in London. Her books reflect a deep affection for the two countries she calls home. Her novels have been listed for major British prizes including the Guardian Prize, the Waterstones Children's Book Prize and the Blue Peter Award. Her latest novel *Bone Talk* – set during the 1899 US invasion of the Philippines – was shortlisted for the Costa Prize and the Carnegie Medal.

### **KEVIN MONROE ISAAC**

Kevin Monroe Isaac is a diplomat representing Saint Kitts and Nevis in the UK. He has been the High Commissioner of Saint Kitts and Nevis to the UK since 2011. He is also Permanent Representative of Saint Kitts and Nevis to the International Maritime Organization and Governor on the Board of the Commonwealth Secretariat. While a successful diplomat, Mr Isaac is also a poet.

### **MARIANA RUIZ JOHNSON**

Mariana Ruiz Johnson is an Argentinian author and illustrator. In 2013 she received the Compostela Prize for Picture Books for her book *Mamá*, published by Kalandraka and translated into ten languages. In 2015 she was the winner of the international Silent Book Contest with her book *While You Are Sleeping*. She currently lives on the outskirts of Buenos Aires with her family.

### **HUANG LI**

Huang Li is an award-winning Chinese illustrator. Her most famous book *The Grandma's House* won first prize in the 6th Feng Zikai Chinese Children's Picture Book Award.

### **DERMOT O'LEARY**

Dermot O'Leary's television and radio work has made him a household name. Career highlights include 10 years hosting the 'National Television Awards', presenting the RTS award-winning 'Live from Space', the BAFTA red carpet and 'Soccer Aid for Unicef'. In addition to his TV work, Dermot has his own podcast series *People Just People* and has published three children's books in the *Toto the Ninja Cat* series, with a fourth edition out this September.

### **NIYI OSUNDARE**

Niyi Osundare is a prolific Nigerian poet, dramatist and literary critic. A champion of free speech – his art and criticism is closely associated with activism. Osundare believes that there is no choice for an African poet but to be political. His work is taught in Nigerian schools, and he is

the recipient of many Nigerian and international prizes, including the Fonlon-Nichols Award for "excellence in literary creativity combined with significant contributions to Human Rights in Africa" and the Nigerian National Merit Award for academic excellence in 2014.

### **DAVID OUIMET**

David Ouimet is an American artist and musician. He is a graduate of Rhode Island School of Design, and his work has been featured on album covers, books and magazines and exhibited at the Museum of American Illustration. In September 2019, Ouimet's debut book as an author and illustrator was published in the UK and Commonwealth by Canongate Books.

### **MICHAEL MORPURGO**

Sir Michael Morpurgo OBE is an award-winning English book author, poet, playwright and librettist who is best known for his magnificent children's novels. His work is noted for its "magical storytelling"; for recurring themes such as the triumph of an outsider, and the fight for survival; for characters' relationships with nature; and for its vivid settings. Morpurgo became the third Children's Laureate from 2003 to 2005.

### **HILARY MCKAY**

Hilary McKay is a British children's author. Her novels are popular for their lively sense of humour, often involving eccentric families. For her first novel, *The Exiles*, she won the 1992 Guardian Children's Fiction Prize: a once-in-a-lifetime book award judged by a panel of British children's writers.

### **GERALDINE MCCAUGHREAN**

Geraldine McCaughrean is a British children's novelist. She has written more than 170 books, including *Peter Pan in Scarlet* – the official sequel to *Peter Pan* – commissioned by Great Ormond Street Hospital. Her work has been translated into 44 languages and published in 50 countries worldwide. She has twice received the Carnegie Medal and Michael L. Printz Award, among others. Her first part-time job, when still at school, was as a receptionist in an optician's shop.

### **GCINA MHLOPHE**

Gcina Mhlophe is a South African anti-apartheid activist, actress, storyteller, poet, playwright, director and author. Storytelling is a deeply traditional activity in South Africa, and Mhlophe is one of the few woman storytellers in a country often dominated by males. She does her work through charismatic, engaging performances, working to preserve storytelling as a means of keeping history alive and encouraging South African children to read. She tells her stories in four of South Africa's languages: English, Afrikaans, Zulu and Xhosa.

### **MANUEL RAICES PEREZ-CASTAÑEDA**

Manuel Raices Perez-Castañeda lives in Havana, Cuba and is a biotechnologist working at the Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology. He is a specialist in diabetes control and quite recently has been involved in training doctors and healthcare personnel facing COVID-19 in Cuba and elsewhere. He has published children's stories that promote interest in science.

### **SANDHYA PRABHAT**

Sandhya Prabhat is an independent animator and illustrator, originally from India. She holds a bachelor's degree in literature from Stella Maris College and a master's degree in animation and digital arts from New York University Tisch School of the Arts Asia. She makes picture books, animates for TV and movies and creates stickers for social media.

### **CHRIS RIDDELL**

Chris Riddell OBE, the 2015–2017 Children's Laureate, is an accomplished artist and the political cartoonist for the Observer. He has enjoyed great acclaim for his books for children. His books have won a number of major prizes, including the 2001, 2004 and 2016 CILIP Kate Greenaway Medals and the Costa Children's Book Award in 2013.

### **KATHERINE RUNDELL**

Katherine Rundell is an award-winning English children's writer and a fellow in English literature at All Souls College, Oxford. She is author of *Rooftoppers*, which in 2014 won both the overall Waterstones Children's Book Prize and the Blue Peter Award for Best Story while also being shortlisted for the Carnegie Medal.

### **AXEL SCHEFFLER**

Axel Scheffler is an award-winning German illustrator and animator of some of the most well-loved children's books. He is best known for his cartoon-like pictures for children's books, in particular *The Gruffalo* and *The Gruffalo's Child*, written by Julia Donaldson.

### **NANDANA SEN**

An award-winning actor, writer, and child-rights activist, Nandana Sen has written six children's books, translated into 15 languages globally. She grew up in India, England and America and has conducted workshops with over 30,000 children across the world. She studied literature at Harvard and filmmaking at USC. Nandana is the Ambassador for Child Protection for Save the Children India.

### **OLIVE SENIOR**

Olive Senior is a Jamaican based in Toronto, Canada. She is the prizewinning author of 18 books of poetry, fiction, non-fiction and children's literature. Her work is taught internationally and has been widely translated. She is a winner of the Commonwealth Writers' Prize and the Bocas Prize for Caribbean Literature, among others, and has been shortlisted for Canada's Governor-General's Award for poetry.

### **CHITRA SOUNДАР**

Chitra Soundar is an internationally published, award-winning Indian author of over 40 books for children. She is also an oral storyteller and writer for theatre and TV for children. Her stories are inspired by folktales from India, Hindu mythology and her travels around the world.

### **ZHOU XIANG**

Zhou Xiang is an award-winning Chinese author and illustrator. He won the Feng Zikai Chinese Children's Picture Book Award for two of his most famous books: *The Day Vegetables Became Goblins* and *The Morning Market at Lotus Town*.

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CLEARLY