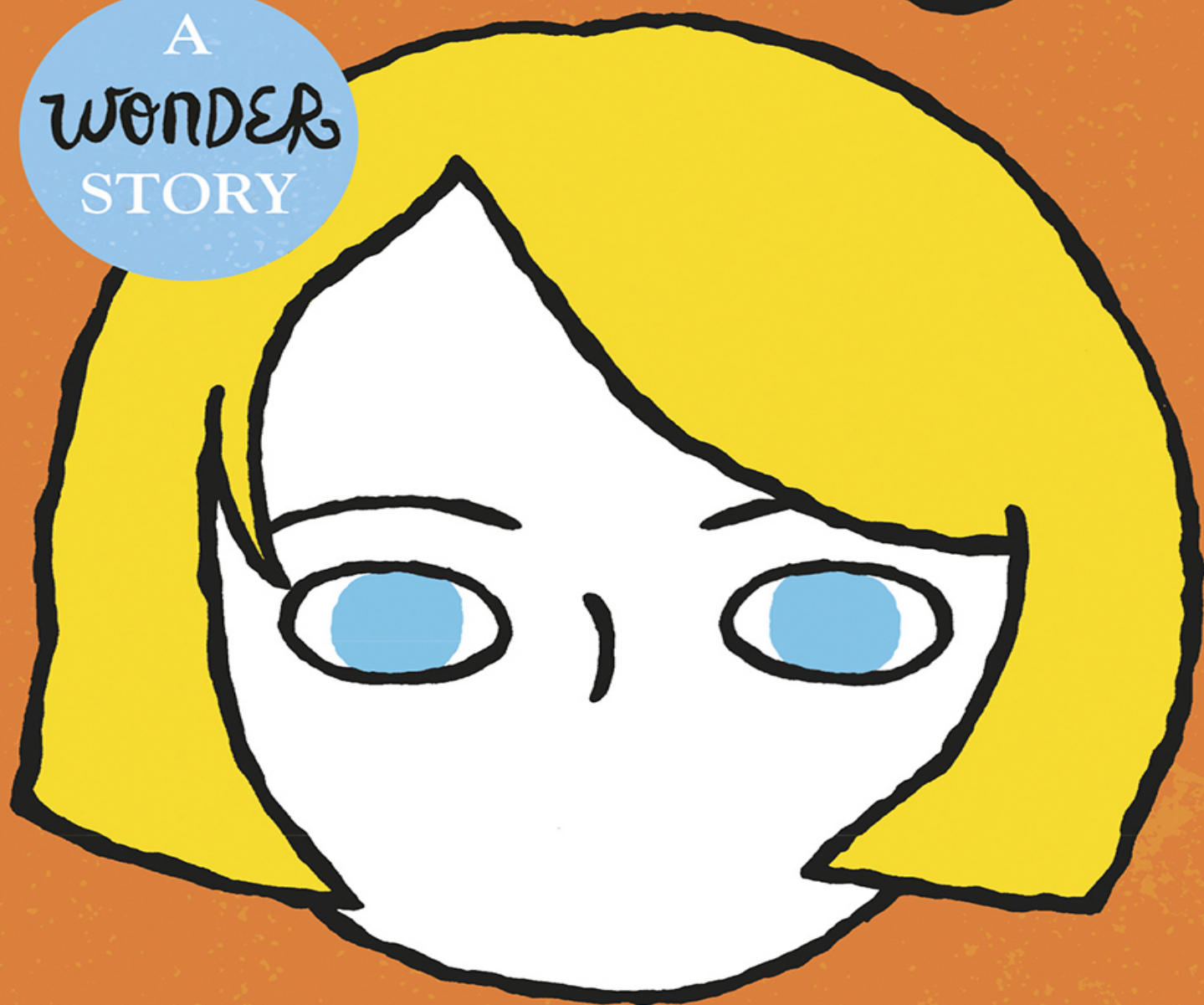


Shingaling

A
WONDER
STORY



R. J. Palacio

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About the Author

Also by R. J. Palacio

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ABOUT THE BOOK

WONDER told the story of August Pullman: an ordinary kid with an extraordinary face, whose first year at school changed the lives and the perspectives of everyone around him.

SHINGALING looks at that year through the eyes of Auggie's classmate, Charlotte: smart, kind, and desperate for acceptance from the popular crowd. Thought-provoking, surprising, poignant and heartwarming, this is a must-read for the thousands of readers who loved *WONDER*.

Shingaling

A Wonder Story

R. J. Palacio

RHCP DIGITAL

*But every Spring
It groweth young again,
And fairies sing.*

—Flower Fairies of the
Spring, 1923

Nobody can do the shingaling like I do.

—The Isley Brothers,
“Nobody but Me”

How I Walked to School

There was a blind old man who played the accordion on Main Street, who I used to see every day on my way to school. He sat on a stool under the awning of the A&P supermarket on the corner of Moore Avenue, his seeing-eye dog lying down in front of him on a blanket. The dog wore a red bandanna around its neck. It was a black Labrador. I know because my sister Beatrix asked him one day.

“Excuse me, sir. What kind of dog is that?”

“Joni is a black Labrador, missy,” he answered.

“She’s really cute. Can I pet her?”

“Best not. She’s working right now.”

“Okay, thank you. Have a good day now.”

“Bye, missy.”

My sister waved at him. He had no way of knowing this, of course, so he didn’t wave back.

Beatrix was eight then. I know because it was my first year at Beecher Prep, which means I was in kindergarten.

I never talked to the accordion-man myself. I hate to admit it, but I was kind of afraid of him back then. His eyes, which were always open, were kind of glazed and cloudy. They were cream-colored, and looked like white-and-tan marbles. It spooked me. I was even a little afraid of his dog, which really made no sense because I usually love dogs. I mean, I *have* a dog! But I was afraid of his dog, who had a gray muzzle and whose eyes were kind of gloopy, too. But—and here’s a big but—even though I was afraid of both of them, the accordion-man *and* his dog, I always dropped a dollar bill into the open accordion case in front of them. And somehow, even though he was playing the accordion,

and no matter how quietly I crept over, the accordion-man would always hear the *swoosh* of the dollar bill as it fell into the accordion case.

“God bless America,” he would say to the air, nodding in my direction.

That always made me wonder. How could he hear that? How did he know what direction to nod at?

My mom explained that blind people develop their other senses to make up for the sense they’ve lost. So, because he was blind, he had super hearing.

That, of course, got me wondering if he had other superpowers, too. Like, in the winter when it was freezing cold, did his fingers have a magical way of keeping warm while they pressed the keys? And how did the rest of him stay warm? On those really frigid days when my teeth would start to chatter after walking just a few blocks against the icy wind, how did he stay warm enough to play his accordion? Sometimes, I’d even see little rivers of ice forming in parts of his mustache and beard, or I’d see him reach down to make sure his dog was covered by the blanket. So I knew he *felt* the cold, but how did he keep playing? If that’s not a superpower, I don’t know what is!

In the wintertime, I always asked my mom for *two* dollars to drop into his accordion case instead of just one.

Swoosh. Swoosh.

“God bless America.”

He played the same eight or ten songs all the time. Except at Christmastime, when he’d play “Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer” and “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing.” But otherwise, it was the same songs. My mom knew the names of some of them. “Delilah.” “Lara’s Theme.” “Those Were the Days.” I downloaded all the titles she named, and she was right, those *were* the songs. But why just those songs? Were they the only songs he ever learned to play, or were they the only songs he remembered? Or did he know

a whole bunch of other songs, but chose to play just those songs?

And all that wondering got me wondering even more! When did he learn to play the accordion? When he was a little boy? Could he see back then? If he couldn't see, how could he read music? Where did he grow up? Where did he live when he wasn't on the corner of Main Street and Moore Avenue? I saw him and his dog walking together sometimes, his right hand holding the dog's harness and his left hand holding the accordion case. They moved so slowly! It didn't seem like they could get very far. So where *did* they go?

There were a lot of questions I would have asked him if I hadn't been afraid of him. But I never asked. I just gave him one-dollar bills.

Swoosh.

"God bless America."

It was always the same.

Then, when I got older and wasn't *that* afraid of him anymore, the questions I used to have about him didn't seem to matter as much to me. I guess I got so accustomed to seeing him, I didn't really think about his foggy eyes or if he had superpowers. It's not like I stopped giving him a dollar when I passed by him or anything. But it was more like a habit now, like swiping a MetroCard through a subway turnstile.

Swoosh.

"God bless America."

By the time I started fifth grade, I stopped seeing him completely because I no longer walked past him on my way to school. The Beecher Prep middle school is a few blocks closer to my house than the lower school was, so now I walk *to* school with Beatrix and my oldest sister, Aimee, and I walk home *from* school with my best friend, Ellie, as well as Maya and Lina, who live near me. Once in a while, at the beginning of the school year, we would go get snacks

at the A&P after school before heading home, and I'd see the accordion-man and give him a dollar and hear him bless America. But as the weather got colder, we didn't do that as much. Which is why it wasn't until a few days into winter break, when I went to the A&P with my mom one afternoon, that I realized that the blind old man who played the accordion on Main Street wasn't there anymore.

He was gone.

How I Spent My Winter Vacation

People who know me always say I'm so dramatic. I have no idea why they say that, because I'm really, really, really *not* dramatic. But when I found out the accordion-man was gone, I kind of lost it! I really don't know why, but I just couldn't stop obsessing about what had happened to him. It was like a mystery that I had to solve! What in the world happened to the blind old man who played the accordion on Main Street?

Nobody seemed to know. My mom and I asked the cashiers in the supermarket, the lady in the dry cleaner's, and the man in the eye shop across the street if they knew anything about him. We even asked the policeman who gave out parking tickets on that block. Everyone knew who he was, but no one knew what had happened to him, just that one day—*poof!*—he wasn't there anymore. The policeman told me that on really cold days, homeless people are actually taken to the city shelters so they won't freeze to death. He thought that's probably what happened to the accordion-man. But the dry-cleaning lady said that she knew for a fact that the accordion-man wasn't homeless. She thought he lived somewhere up in Riverdale because she'd see him getting off the Bx3 bus early in the mornings with his dog. And the eye-shop man said that he was certain that the accordion-man had been a famous jazz musician once and was actually loaded, so I shouldn't worry about him.

You would think these answers would have helped me, right? But they didn't! They just raised a whole bunch of other questions that made me even *more* curious about

him. Like, was he in a homeless shelter for the winter? Was he living in his own beautiful house in Riverdale? Had he really been a famous jazz musician? Was he rich? If he was rich, why was he playing for money?

My whole family got sick and tired of my talking about this, by the way.

Beatrix was like: “Charlotte, if you talk about this one more time, I’m going to throw up all over you!”

And Aimee said, “Charlotte, will you just *drop* it already?”

My mom’s the one who suggested that a good way to “channel” my energy would be to start a coat drive in our neighborhood to benefit homeless people. We put up flyers asking people to donate their “gently worn” coats by dropping them off in plastic bags in a giant bin we left in front of our brownstone. Then, after we’d collected about ten huge garbage bags full of coats, my mom and dad and I drove all the way downtown to the Bowery Mission to donate the coats. I have to say, it felt really good to give all those coats to people who really needed them! I looked around when I was inside the mission with my parents to see if maybe the accordion-man was there, but he wasn’t. Anyway, I knew he had a nice coat already: a bright orange Canada Goose parka that made my mom hopeful that the rumors about his being rich might actually be true.

“You don’t see many homeless people wearing Canada Goose,” observed Mom.

When I got back to school after winter break, Mr. Tushman, the middle school director, congratulated me on having started a coat drive. I’m not sure how he knew, but he knew. It was generally agreed upon that Mr. Tushman had some kind of secret surveillance drone keeping tabs on everything going on at Beecher Prep: there was no other way he could know all the stuff he seemed to know.

“That’s a beautiful way to spend your winter vacation, Charlotte,” he said.

“Aw, thank you, Mr. Tushman!”

I loved Mr. Tushman. He was always really nice. What I liked was that he was one of those teachers that never talks to you like you're some little kid. He always uses big words, assuming you know and understand them, and he never looks away when you're talking to him. I also loved that he wore suspenders and a bow tie and bright red sneakers.

"Do you think you could help me organize a coat drive here at Beecher Prep?" he asked. "Now that you're an expert at it, I would love your input."

"Sure!" I answered.

Which is how I ended up being part of the first annual Beecher Prep Coat Drive.

In any case, between the coat drive and all the other drama going on at school when I got back from winter vacation (more on that soon!), I didn't really get a chance to solve the mystery of what happened to the blind old man who played the accordion on Main Street. Ellie didn't seem the least bit interested in helping me solve the mystery, though it was the kind of thing that she might have been into just a few months before. And neither Maya nor Lina seemed to remember him at all. In fact, no one seemed to care about what happened to him in the least, so finally, I just dropped the subject.

I still thought about the accordion-man sometimes, though. Every once in a while, one of the songs he used to play on his accordion would come back to me. And then I'd hum it all day long.