

## The Magic Store

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There is dust on the cover. The pages are tattered and torn. Slowly, I turn to the first page and am greeted by an overwhelming smell of mustiness. As I flip through the pages, taking in each illustration one at a time, I begin to remember. The images are fuzzy at first, but gradually I am drawn back to another time, a time long ago.

My brother and I bounce around in the backseat of the old burgundy Honda. It's partly due to the rundown state of the road and partly due to the uncontrollable energy and excitement of my brother, Ryan, and I.

"Mommy mommy can we go?" I optimistically exclaim, verbalizing the question that has been on my mind all afternoon.

"Pleeeeeease?" Ryan chimes in, hoping to sway the opinion of my mother. After a few minutes of friendly bickering, our mother finally consents and informs us that we can go.

"Yay!" my brother and I joyously shout from the backseat. I crane my neck to peer out the window as we cruise down the street, awaiting the sight of that familiar, weathered red brick of the building. Ryan spots it first, shouting and pointing. Normally I would be upset at the abysmal loss, especially since the object we were looking for was on my side of the car, but I'm too excited to hold grudges at the moment.

I burst through the door first to the familiar ting-a-ling of the bell and am met with the pleasant, slightly musty smell of old books that I have grown to love. I have no time to dally, however, as Ryan is right behind me. We ignore the friendly "whoa there!" from behind the counter and continue on our frantic search. Zigzagging this way and that, I dash through the maze of shelves, ignoring everything except that which is at the forefront of my mind: the cat. Finally, as I turn the corner, I nearly trip over Arthur, interrupting his afternoon stroll. "Found him!" I triumphantly shout. My brother comes running, sad that he has lost the race but glad to see Arthur once again, even if he's in my arms at the moment. We both stroke the cat; his soft, calico hair feels good in between my fingertips. A low sound, barely audible

at first, enters my ears. I can hear it clearly now, and feel it too. Arthur is purring; apparently he's glad to see us too.

After a short time, Arthur grows bored and wanders off to have some solitude. Now that our ritual with the cat is complete, my brother and I decide to follow suit and each wander off in our own direction. Now that I have time to enjoy the scenery, I crane my neck back and look up at the monstrous shelves towering over me, each one filled to the brim with books. Old books. Used books. Enjoyed books. Loved books. Hated books. Read books. I feel small as I stare up at them, but I'm not overwhelmed. I enjoy all of the possibilities. Haughtily, I walk through the children's books without giving them any regard; I'm much too good for those simple, *children's* books. I know exactly where I'm headed.

I descend the stairs one at a time, feeling the chill of the basement envelop me. I take the first right, then a left, then another right...or was that supposed to be a left? Eventually I arrive at my destination: Non-Fiction: Animals A-Z. I grab a ladder and precariously teeter my way up to the top shelf. So many decisions. *Lions? No, too common. Birds? No, not ferocious enough.* Eventually my eyes settle on a book: *Unique and Interesting Animals of Australia*. I pluck it from the shelf, return the ladder to its place, and move on to mission number two: finding the perfect spot to read.

I settle into a corner and am just about to read when a voice interrupts me. "Time to go!" states my mom. From her friendly but stern tone I can tell there's no use arguing. Begrudgingly, I arise from my seat and put the book back on its shelf. I mosey back through the maze, my mother beside me this time, and begin to climb the stairs. As I am halfway up the flight, I suddenly remember. My old books! How could I have forgotten? I lightly scamper up the last few steps and up to the counter. "How much did I get?" I demand.

"Well now, let's see here," comes the familiar, serene voice from across the counter. "Hmm..." The waiting is killing me! "Ah yes, Anderson," he drawls. "Here we are; it looks like I've got you down for seventeen dollars credit or eight fifty cash."

"I'll take the credit," I say, attempting to maintain the composure that I falsely believe to possess. I turn away from the counter, walk around the corner, and then fly down the steps. Right, left, left. I got it

right this time! I snatch the ladder and yank the book off the shelf, causing several others to tumble off with it. Hastily I stuff them back onto the shelves and look at the cover of the book. This is the moment of truth. Twelve dollars even, the price tag reads. I have enough! I take *my* book and rush back up the stairs and to the counter, not worrying about composure at all this time. “I’ll take his one,” I inform Mr. Hyde.

“A good choice, young man,” he informs me – as if I didn’t already know – as he peers at me over his spectacles. My card now only reads five dollars, but it was worth it! I rush out of the store and almost knock my mom over as she’s coming back in to see where in tarnation I ran off to this time. I place my book in the trunk – no reading in the car – and hop into the back seat alongside my brother.

The drive home lasts at least two eternities, but finally we pull down the shaded street and into our driveway. Before the car comes to a complete stop, I open the door, jump out, grab my book from the trunk (after several seconds of pounding on it to be opened), and dash upstairs to my room. I crawl into the comfy chair in the reading corner and settle in to enjoy my book. I take it out of the bag and hold the precious treasure in my hands. There is dust on the cover. The pages are tattered and torn. Slowly I open to the first page and am greeted by an overwhelming smell of mustiness. As I flip through the pages, taking in each illustration one at a time, I know that I have discovered a world of my own, to which I can escape whenever the real world becomes too much to handle and I need a break.