

Lucky Horseshoes

a tale from the Iris the Dragon Series
a children's book dealing with ADHD



Author: Gayle Grass Illustrator: Graham Ross

Lucky Horseshoes

A Tale from The Iris the Dragon Series

Written by Gayle Grass

Illustrations by Graham Ross

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Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Gayle, Grass, 1948-

Lucky Horseshoes

Graham Ross, illustrator

(A Tale from The Iris the Dragon Series: 2nd in the series)

Digital Edition: 978-0-9921041-4-6

BISAC 1. EDU006000 2. EDU010000, EDU026000, FAM000000, FAM012000, FAM046000, FAM028000

BIC 1. JNSG2 2. JFFJ, JFSP1, JKSM, JKSN2, JN, JNFN, JNH, JNLB, JNSQ, JNSL

I.Ross, Graham [1962]- II. Title. III. Series: Grass, Gayle, 1948- .

The Iris the Dragon Series.

Editor: Jessica Grass

Layout and Design: Graham Ross

Digital edition generated in the USA by ePubDirect, NY.

Iris the Dragon Inc.

285 Grassmere Lane, Perth, Ontario, Canada, K7H 3C7

E-mail: info@iristhedragon.com

Website: www.iristhedragon.com

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Sponsorship: Iris the Dragon is a registered Canadian charity, #81398 5017 RR 0001. The production and distribution of Iris the Dragon mental health resources globally are made possible by the generous donations and support of major corporations and organizations. Please contact us to partner on improving the lives of the millions of people we are reaching with our educational products.

About The Iris the Dragon Book Series

Years of stigma towards mental health disorders drove the topic into the shadows where people suffered alone in isolation. While attitudes toward discussing mental health disorders have shifted in recent years there is still a long way to go. It is hard enough to talk about the topic and it is even harder for people experiencing the confusing symptoms and feelings associated with mental health disorders to put words to their experiences. To help move the world mental health agenda forward in educating people about the interconnectedness of mental health and overall wellness, author Gayle Grass of the Iris the Dragon series is starting the discussion early with youth. Reflecting the World Health Organization's sentiments that "there is no health without mental health," (WHO, 2014) Gayle has selected the vehicle of the storybook to communicate this message and hopes to change future generation's perspective.

Iris the Dragon's books address a variety of mental health disorders and stress the need for creating a supportive and understanding community to help deal with issues relating to a mental health disorder and to reduce the stigma surrounding this topic. Iris the Dragon was first created in 2000 and since then has seen a huge increase in demand for books on mental health for youth. In 2013, a study on one of Iris the Dragon's books was published by the Mental Health Commission of Canada and showed that after 20 minutes of reading the attitudes of children toward those with mental illness or towards the topic of mental health were positively changed.

Iris the Dragon Charity was created to provide educational material for adults and young readers to help facilitate a conversation between caregivers and children about issues relating to mental health and emotional wellness. The books are intended to provide comfort in talking about mental health to create a safe space for discussing and exploring the topic further.

There are currently 6 books in the series each addressing different mental health challenges and each vetted by medical experts:

"Catch a Falling Star" – Presents readers with a variety of symptoms that could be considered "red flags" in a child's emotional and social development.

"Lucky Horseshoes" – Illustrates the feelings and thoughts of an ADHD child. It gives children with ADHD an opportunity to identify with their thoughts, feelings and actions through a young character called Skippy.

"Hole in One" – Addresses anxiety disorder in children; specifically anxiety about going to school and performance. It's an opportunity for children to identify with their thoughts, feelings and actions.

"I Can Fix It!" – Focuses on Asperger's Syndrome, one of the Autism Spectrum Disorders, and the importance of a caring community surrounding children with developmental, emotional and behavioral challenges.

"He Shoots! He Scores!" – Addresses the topic of self stigma and family stigma and provides a medium to help society at large understand the challenges that a child faces with a mental health condition.

"Project: Kids, Let's Talk" – A special edition Iris the Dragon book for military families. Iris meets a young boy who is dealing with the challenges (loneliness, worry and anger) of being in a Canadian military family.

For teachers, Iris the Dragon has a curriculum-aligned, "Units of Study" program for regular classroom delivery to deconstruct bullying, develop healthy minds and learn to self-advocate.

For more information on the Iris the Dragon Book Series, the team and their resources, visit www.iristhedragon.com.

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FALL



Skippy sat on an old rocking chair on her porch watching the river flow by. School was over for the day and she liked to sit here and relax and dream about horses. All of a sudden, Skippy noticed a strange ripple moving upstream.

Skippy decided to check it out. She ran down to the riverbank and stood on a loose pile of rocks to have a better look. Suddenly, she slipped and before she knew it, she had fallen into the fast flowing water.

As she was trying to swim to shore, Skippy felt something large and bumpy under her, like an old log, carrying her through the water towards the river's edge. As they rose out of the water, she saw that the log had a head with very large ears.

“Who are you?” Skippy screamed,
when she realized the log was alive.

“I’m Iris, a green swamp dragon.”
Don’t be afraid Skippy, I’m really very friendly.”







“Where do you come from?”

asked Skippy staring intently at Iris.

“I live down the river under the old bridge. I have my cave there. I was on my way home and saw you in the water. It looked like you needed some help. Can I sit and rest with you for a moment? Iris asked, climbing out of the water.

“Sure and thanks for helping me. That was a close call,” Skippy laughed nervously.



She noticed that Iris was quite small for a dragon. On her head she wore an old straw hat filled with flowers and on her back she carried a dilapidated knapsack. But what caught Skippy's eyes were Iris's beautiful blue wings as she spread them wide to dry in the breeze.

"I was just sitting on my porch dreaming of owning my own horse," Skippy continued. "Then I saw you in the water and I slipped on the rocks and fell in. Mom will be really mad when I tell her that I fell in the river. She says I'm always doing things without thinking. You know, like saying something before realizing it could get me into trouble."

"Or like running to the edge of the water without thinking the rocks could be slippery?" prompted Iris.

"Right," smiled Skippy realizing Iris understood.

"Why do they call you Skippy?" Iris continued.
"It is an unusual name."

"Yes," replied Skippy, "but my Dad gave me that nickname when I was little because he said that ever since I could walk, I have always been skipping here and skipping there. My Dad died when I was very young so I don't really remember him very well, but everyone still calls me Skippy."

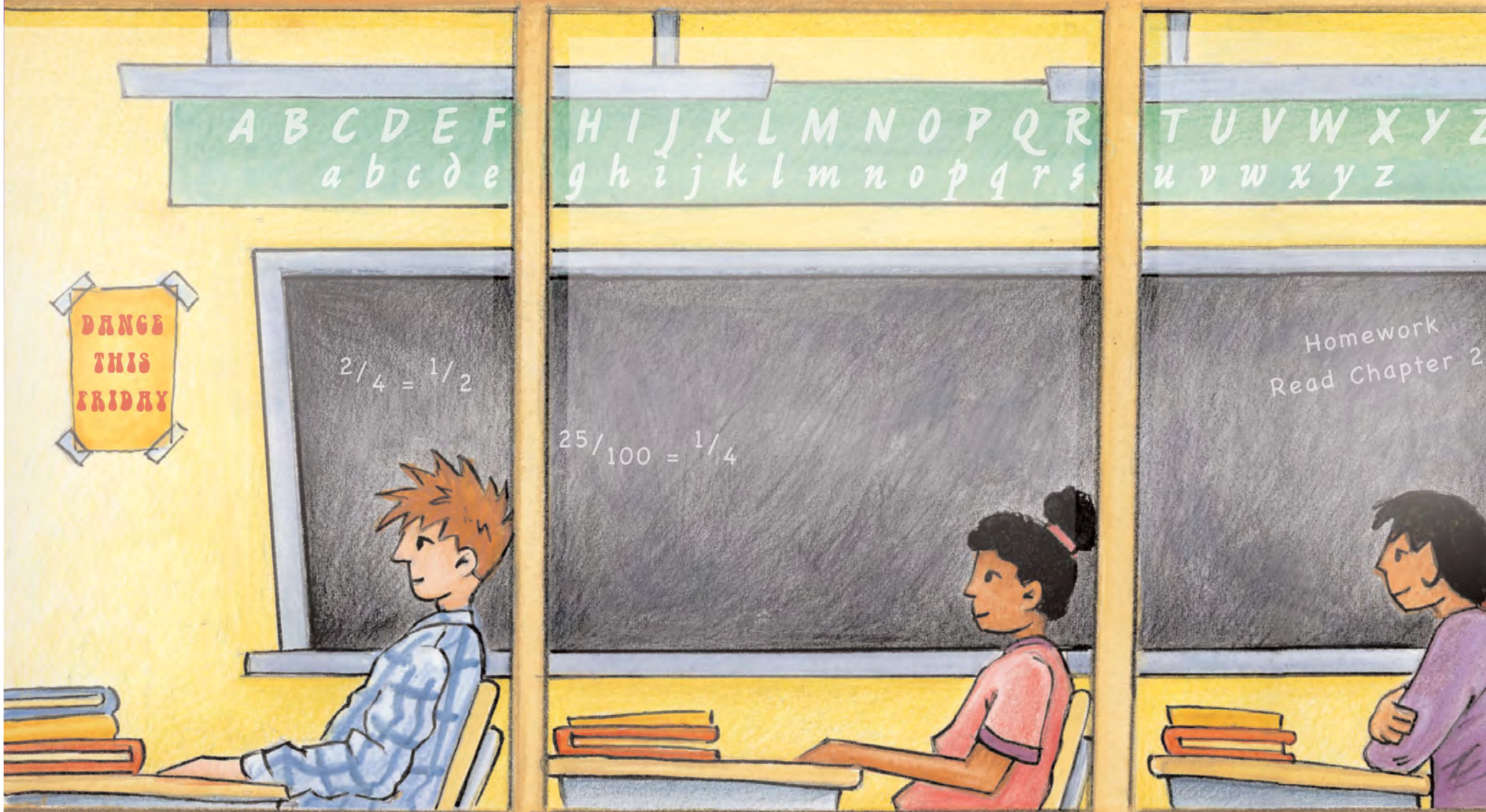
Iris thought for a moment and then she said, "Skippy, I have an idea. Would you like to go on an excursion with me tomorrow to meet some of my riverbank friends?"

Skippy was so excited that she jumped up and down and exclaimed:

"When can we go?"

"We will go tomorrow after school. Now please go home and get into some dry clothes," laughed Iris.







Skippy was so excited she could hardly sleep that night. She kept dreaming about flying through the sky on a magical horse with her new friend Iris by her side.

The next day at school, Skippy had her usual problems. She found it very hard to concentrate. The sounds in the halls, the shouts and laughing of the children in the yard, and sometimes the lights in the classroom bothered her as well. She tried to avoid them by moving around in her chair but this got her into trouble. Often the best way to ignore the noises was to daydream.

As soon as the bell rang, Skippy dashed out of school as fast as she could and raced home. Rounding the corner of her house, her foot caught on the edge of the porch.

“Ouch,” yelped Skippy, as she fell flat on her face.

“Are you OK?”

cried Iris, hurrying out of the water.

“I think so, but my knee hurts,” sniffed Skippy.

“Let me take a look at it. I know a lot about scrapes and bruises,” said Iris. “The riverbank animals are always coming to me to fix their injuries.”

Iris gently cleaned Skippy’s knee. Then she reached into her knapsack and took out a little package.

“I never leave home without this cream. It is some healing cream that I made myself,” Iris said as she spread some over Skippy’s knee.

“That smells funny,” said Skippy wrinkling her nose.

“It’s made from the finest riverbank herbs and local plants. It works wonders,” explained Iris.

After spreading the cream, Iris reached into her knapsack again and pulled out a large red handkerchief. Wrapping it around Skippy’s knee, she said:

“There that will help it.

**Now climb on my back
and hold tight to my knapsack.”**







Iris and Skippy had a wonderful afternoon. Just down the river they met up with some of Iris's friends, Madeleine Frog and Ottie Otter. Madeleine was very shy but gradually showed Skippy her baby frogies. Ottie Otter was his usual chatty self and never stopped talking. He wanted to show off for Skippy so he kept sliding down the river bank and plunging into the river. Skippy loved meeting them and gave them each a little hand shake as they left.

On the way home, Skippy told Iris that this was one of the happiest days of her life. "You know Iris," she said, "Right now I feel really relaxed. But sometimes I get so frustrated I get really angry and I think I'm going to explode. It mostly happens when I feel I can't do anything right. Then I scream at my mom and sometimes break things. I feel really bad afterwards as my mom tries so hard to help me."

Iris nodded her head. She understood that something was causing Skippy to feel like this and she knew that it would take a lot of time and patience to figure out exactly what Skippy's problem was. She also knew that there were people who could help Skippy and she was hopeful that together they could all help Skippy feel less angry and more confident about herself.

When they reached the shore in front of Skippy's house, Iris asked.

"Would you like to take another trip this weekend? I would like you to meet a little colt called Little Ben. He is only a few months old."

Skippy's face lit up in a big smile and she danced around Iris.

"This would be the best thing in my whole life to see a baby horse."

"I'll be waiting at the riverbank Iris. I can hardly wait," she yelled as she ran up the path to her house.



When Skippy woke up on Saturday, the sun was streaming through her window. “This is going to be a great day,” she thought as she jumped out of bed.

But over breakfast, the problems started.

“Skippy, I want to talk to you about something,”

her mother began. “You know last year you had problems at school. No matter how hard you tried, you often couldn’t sit still. And the teacher kept saying you weren’t trying hard enough even though you thought you were? She said you weren’t focused and were forgetting to do your homework?”

“I remember Mom and I’m really trying this year, but I still get into trouble.” Skippy replied.

“I know, and last week I went and talked to your new teacher. She said the reason you might be getting angry at times may have something to do with the way your brain works. She thinks I should talk to the principal and ask that we get special tests for you. Then we can see what the problem really is and figure out ways to make it better.”

“Aw Mom no,” screamed Skippy, suddenly getting very angry. “I don’t need these tests. It won’t help. All the other kids will find out that I’m having them and they will laugh at me.

They’ll think I’m different.”

Skippy was so upset that she ran out of the house, knocking her breakfast all over the floor. With tears in her eyes, Skippy ran down to the river and along the path that led to the wooden bridge and Iris’s cave.





All of a sudden, she heard a strange noise. She stopped. It sounded like a horse's whinny. But what would a horse be doing here? She stepped forward very quietly, and just around the bend, behind some bushes, she saw a baby colt. His ears were back and he looked frightened. Skippy moved slowly forward. As the colt strained forward to get a sniff of her, his hoof slipped on a rock and he went down, banging his knee.

Just then, Iris appeared.

"Oh Iris, I think I frightened the little horse and he's hurt. Can you help him?" Skippy whispered.

Iris came towards the colt. She rubbed noses with him and whispered something in his ear.

"What did he say, what did he say?" Skippy asked impatiently. "Is he alright?"

"I'm just going to look at his knee. Try and sit quietly," Iris answered. She reached into her knapsack and took out her healing cream and red handkerchief and carefully bandaged the colt's knee.

"Skippy come and meet Little Ben. He is fine but a little scared as he wandered too far away from his mother and got lost. I told him I will take him home."

Skippy walked slowly up to Little Ben so as not to scare him. When she got close she stood very still. Little Ben sniffed her gently and then put his head down and rubbed his nose against Skippy's arm.

"He likes you Skippy," said Iris.

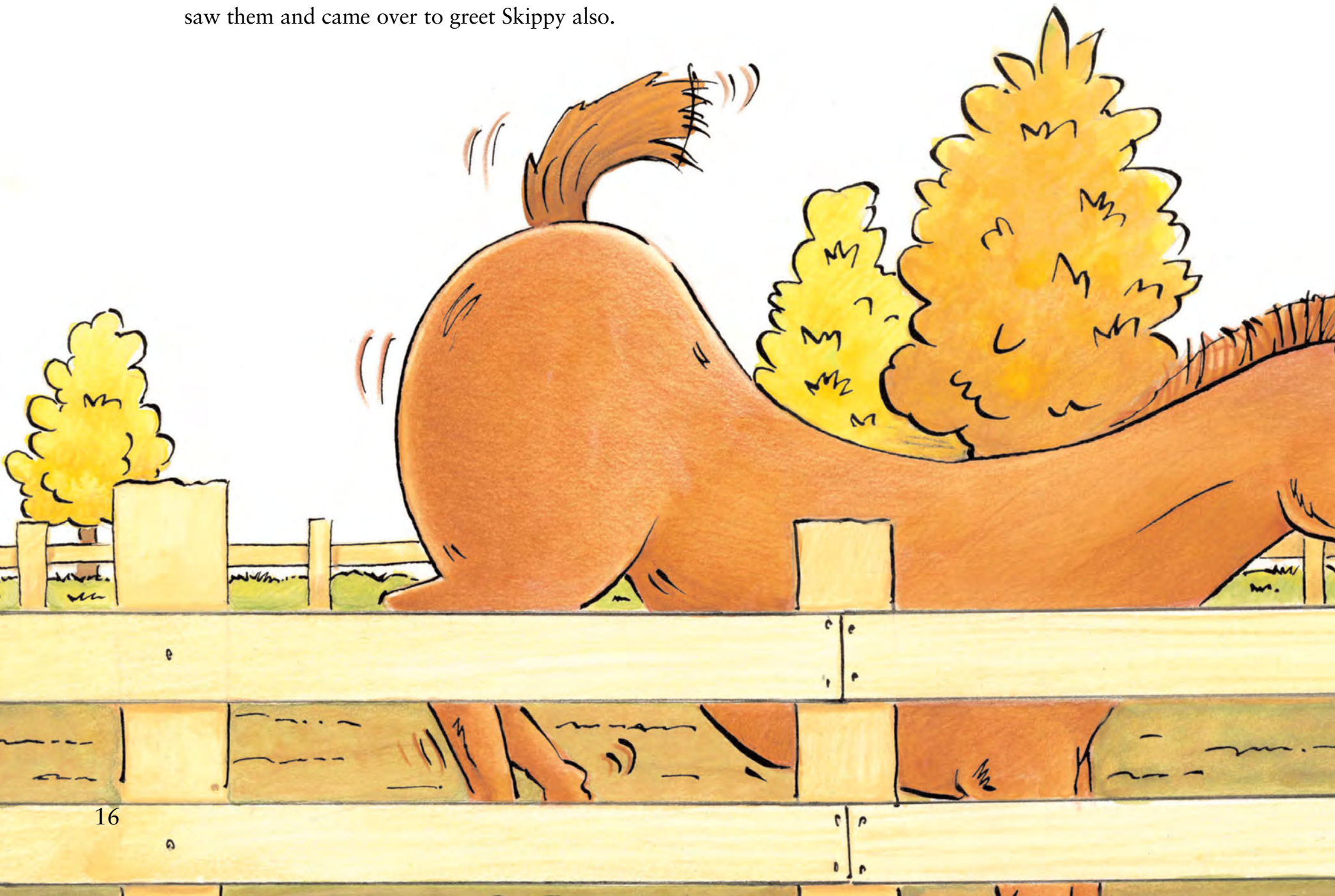
"I like him too," said Skippy shyly.

"Skippy, I am going to take him home now but I hear your mother calling you. She sounds worried. You had better run home. I'll see you later this afternoon and we'll go and visit Little Ben at his farm."





That afternoon Skippy and Iris walked over to the farm. As they got near, Little Ben recognized Skippy and let out a loud whinny and ran over to greet her. His little tail was wagging back and forth and he tried to get Skippy to chase him around the paddock. Just then Annabel, the owner of the farm saw them and came over to greet Skippy also.



She explained that Little Ben's legs were unsteady because he had been born a few weeks early, but she hoped that with help and exercise he would get stronger. As Iris and Skippy were leaving, Annabel invited Skippy to come and visit Little Ben whenever she wanted.

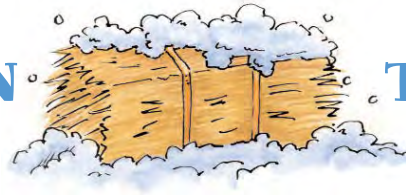
“I’ll come often,” Skippy answered, as she gave Little Ben one final hug.



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Almost every day after school, Skippy visited Little Ben. Even when it was cold outside, the stable was cozy and warm. Iris would keep Skippy and Little Ben amused and relaxed with her many stories of magical horses and dragons that could fly all over the world.

One afternoon, Skippy was late. Iris was in the barn, sitting on a bale of straw, waiting for her.

“What’s the problem?” she asked, as Skippy raced in, out of breath.

“Oh, Iris I got into trouble again at school. I’m not supposed to leave my seat. But sometimes it’s hard for me to sit still and I need to move. I can’t seem to concentrate on my work. My teacher made me stay after school to catch up on my math. I wish I didn’t ever have to go to school. I can’t seem to do anything right there.”

“Don’t worry, Skippy. Just think of what a good job you do here at the stables,” Iris replied.

“But that’s easy. I really like being here.” Skippy said. “I wish I could stay here all the time.”

“Well, perhaps you could come here more often. Annabel needs help in the barn and maybe you could do some work for her, suggested Iris.”

“That’s a great idea, Skippy answered excitedly. Just wait here Iris, and I’ll go ask her.”

In a few minutes, Skippy ran back, beaming.

“Annabel said that if my mom agrees, I could come three times a week and on Saturday’s to help clean the stalls and work with Little Ben. His legs are still weak and he needs exercise. Annabel said I could help him get big and strong so he might be a famous jumping horse just like his father. Oh Iris, I’m so happy.”





When Skippy's mother heard about this plan, she thought it was a great idea. Helping at the barn would keep Skippy busy and make her feel better about herself.

Skippy loved her new job. Cleaning out the stables was hard work, but when her chores were done, she could spend all her time with Little Ben. She brushed his coat until it shone. To make his legs stronger, she exercised him by slowly leading him around and around on a halter and lead rope.





One day a terrible thing happened at school. Skippy's teacher had asked her to clean out the rabbit cages. Skippy was sure she could do a good job. If she could clean out a horse stall, she could clean a cage. But just as Skippy was finishing she thought of something she wanted to do with Little Ben and ran off forgetting to lock the rabbit cages.



The next day, when she arrived at school, the rabbits were hopping around the classroom and down the halls. The other kids thought this was hilarious, but the teacher scolded Skippy for not locking the door.

Skippy's mother was worried.

**“Skippy, if you are so forgetful, you might forget to
lock the stable door and the horses could get out.”**

Skippy was furious. “You can’t stop me from seeing Little Ben. He really needs me and I’m helping him get better. It’s not fair. My friend Iris the dragon says I’m doing a wonderful job. So does Annabel,” she cried as she raced out the door.



SKIPPY

ALYSSA



With tears of anger streaming down her face, Skippy ran to the stables. No one was around so she opened the door to Little Ben's stall and curled up in the hay. The colt put his nose down and gently nuzzled her. He lay down beside her to keep her warm and soon they were both sound asleep.

Skippy was wakened from a deep dream by voices calling to each other.

“Here she is,”

someone cried, peering over the stall door.

As she looked up, Skippy saw strange faces looking down at her. In the crowd she saw her mom, looking very upset.

Skippy thought her mom would be really mad that she had run away. But as they walked home along the river path, Skippy's mother said to her, "Skippy I know you didn't mean to do anything wrong. But we didn't know where you were."

"Sorry, mom," Skippy replied. "I got so angry I just ran and ran and then I fell asleep in Little Ben's stall."

"I have a suggestion," her mother answered. "Both you and Little Ben have a condition. He has weak muscles in his legs and needs special help. You may have a chemical imbalance in your brain, and you too might need special help. If you and Little Ben both work hard, I know things will get a lot better for you both. He may even get strong enough that you can show him at the summer fair."

What do you think?"





BEN

“I really want things to get better at school and I really want to help Little Ben,” Skippy answered.
“Let me think it over Mom.”

The next day, Iris was waiting for Skippy down at the riverbank. When Skippy told her what had happened, Iris said, “Little Ben may never be a jumper like his father, but with care and exercise he might one day run without a limp. You want that for him, don’t you Skippy?”

“Oh yes, with all my heart,” answered Skippy.

“Well, your mother wants to do the same for you. She hopes that with treatment and care you will be able to do better at school. Will you let your mom and the teachers help you, and we will both help Little Ben?” Iris asked.” Then she reached into her knapsack and pulled out an old horseshoe.

“And to help you both achieve your dreams, I think we should put this horseshoe over Little Ben’s stall door.

I know it will bring you both good luck,”
laughed Iris.



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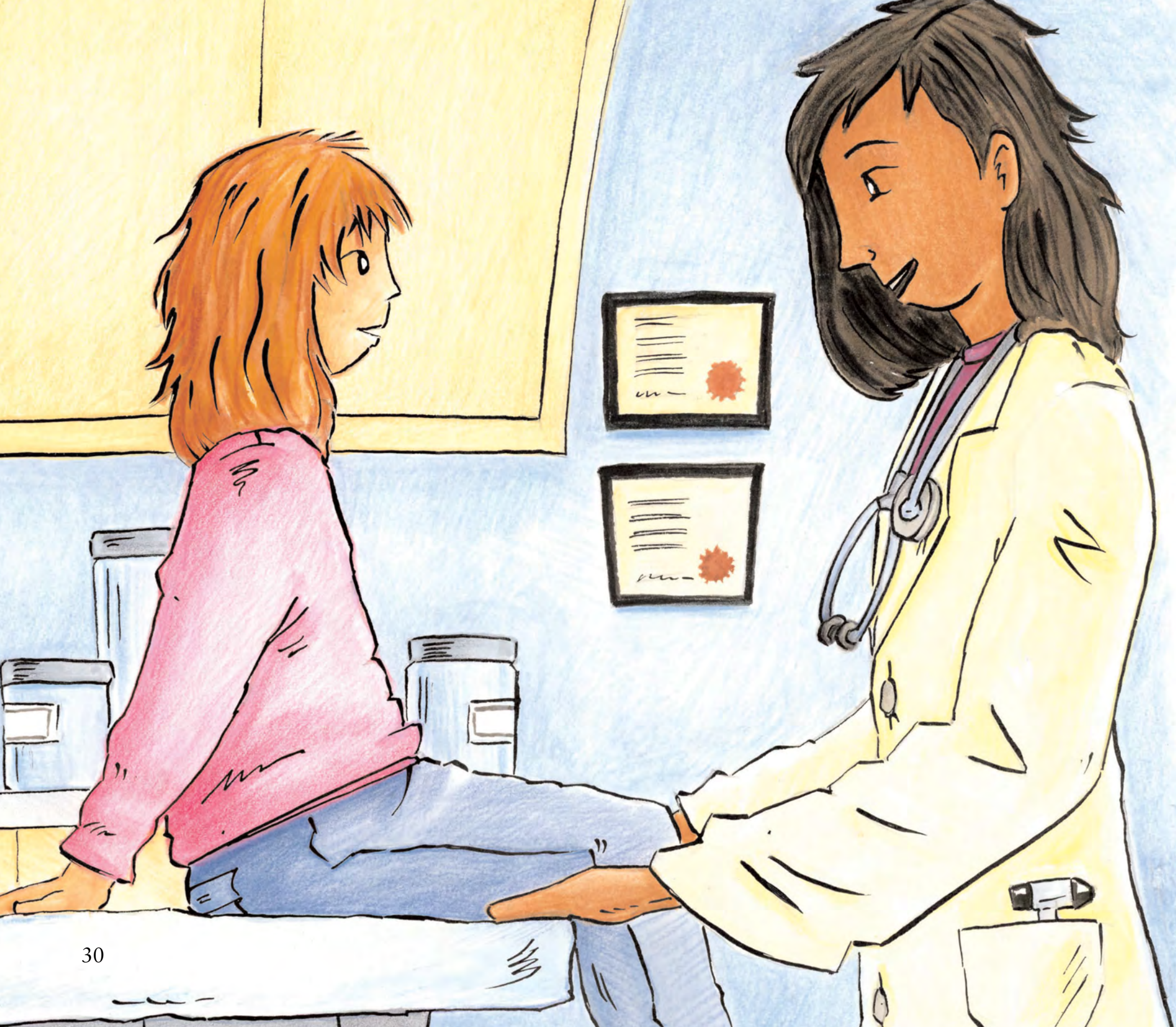
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The weeks passed quickly. The days got warmer and the snow was melting quickly. One afternoon, Skippy heard a sound high in the sky. Looking up she saw a flock of Canada geese flying north, and she knew spring had come.

As Skippy was leading Little Ben around the outdoor paddock on a warm April morning, Annabel came up smiling.

“Now that Little Ben can exercise outside, I think we should get to work on a special program for him,” she said. “The vet came yesterday and gave Little Ben a full checkup. He said we should give him new feed and extra vitamins. Also, Bob the ferrier is coming tomorrow to work on Little Ben’s hooves. That will help his legs. And I will show you how to halter train Little Ben for the shows. If all goes well, you may be able to show him at the local fair this summer.”





Skippy's mom was also arranging a program for Skippy. First, Skippy went with her to visit her doctor. She gave her a full medical checkup and suggested that Skippy and her mother consult with other doctors who were specialists in mental health in order to understand Skippy's illness.

Next, her mother had a long meeting with the school principal and they agreed that it would benefit Skippy if she had a set of tests called a psycho-educational assessment.

“What’s that?” asked Skippy, sounding worried.

“It’s a way of testing to figure out how we can find ways to help you do better in school. Just like the vet checked out Little Ben and suggested how he could get stronger, experts will test you and recommend how you can do better in school and be more relaxed.”

Skippy was a little worried about these tests, but she knew they would help. She was very patient and tried her best to cooperate. She thought of what Little Ben had to go through with the Vet and how brave he was. Skippy couldn't disappoint Little Ben.

A few weeks later when Skippy saw Iris, she told her about what had happened.

“Iris, I have my own IEP,” Skippy said proudly.

“That’s wonderful and what is your IEP?”

asked Iris.

Well, my tests showed that I have attention deficit disorder with hyperactivity and that I need extra help to do well in school. My principal gave me my own educational program which means my teacher can help me in different ways than she does with the other kids. At first I was scared that the other kids would tease me, but they don't. I really like my new program. I understand things better and I got a really good report card last week. Also, my mom has learned a special reward program for me to keep me focused and on task. And when I get upset and angry at my mom, I am sent to my room for a quiet time. I don't run away anymore and my room is a safe place to calm down in."

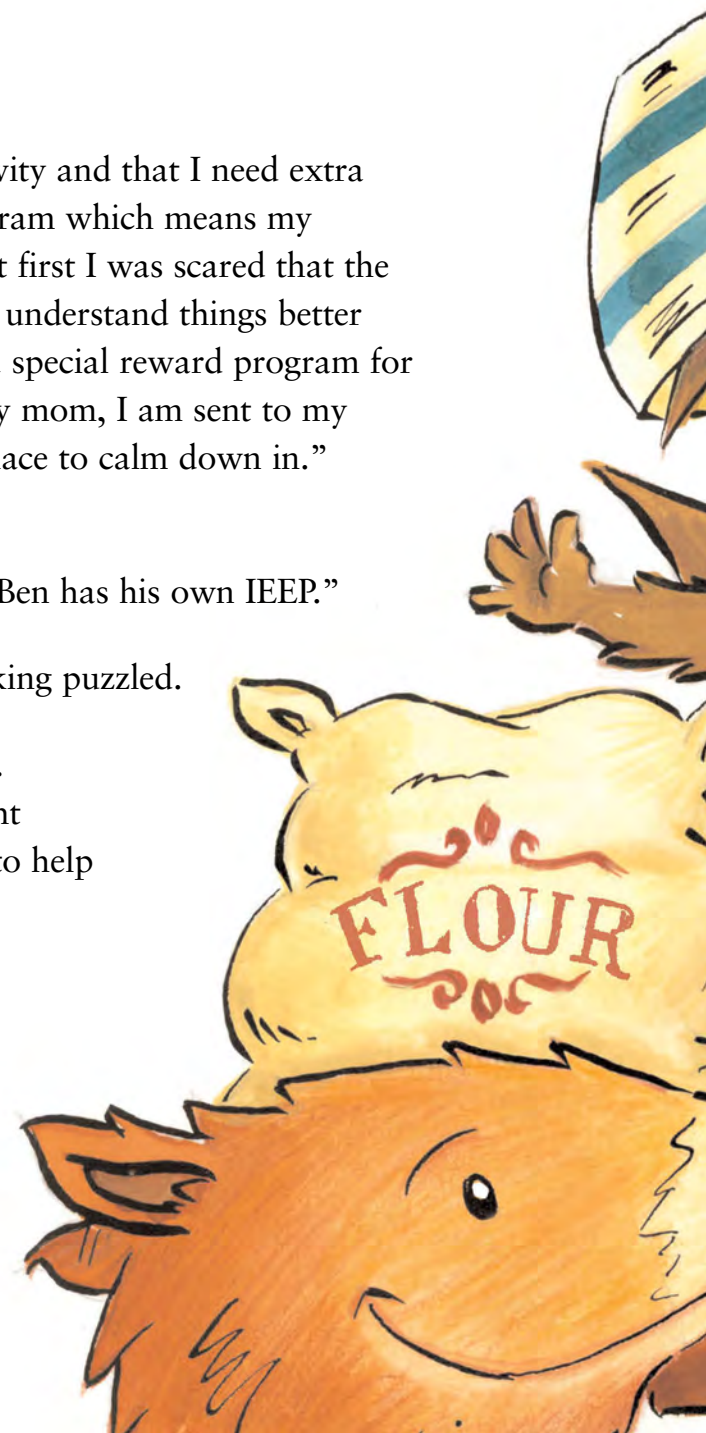
"I'm so proud of you," said Iris.

You have your own IEP and Little Ben has his own IEEP."

"What do you mean?" asked Skippy looking puzzled.

"His very own Individual Exercise and Eating Plan," Iris replied, laughing.

"You're in charge of the exercise and I'll help with the food. I'm going right home to check my magic recipe books so that I can prepare special foods to help Little Ben grow stronger. See you tomorrow."





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kippy was bursting with excitement. It was the last day of school and the opening of the county fair was in two days. Skippy had spent many months exercising Little Ben and Annabel felt he was now strong enough to show.

School ended with a party for the students, their parents and the teachers. The principal gave a short speech and presented awards to the most outstanding students. Then the principal stepped up to the podium again and said:

“Today we have a new award to give - a prize for the student who has made the most progress. And the winner of that prize is Skippy.”

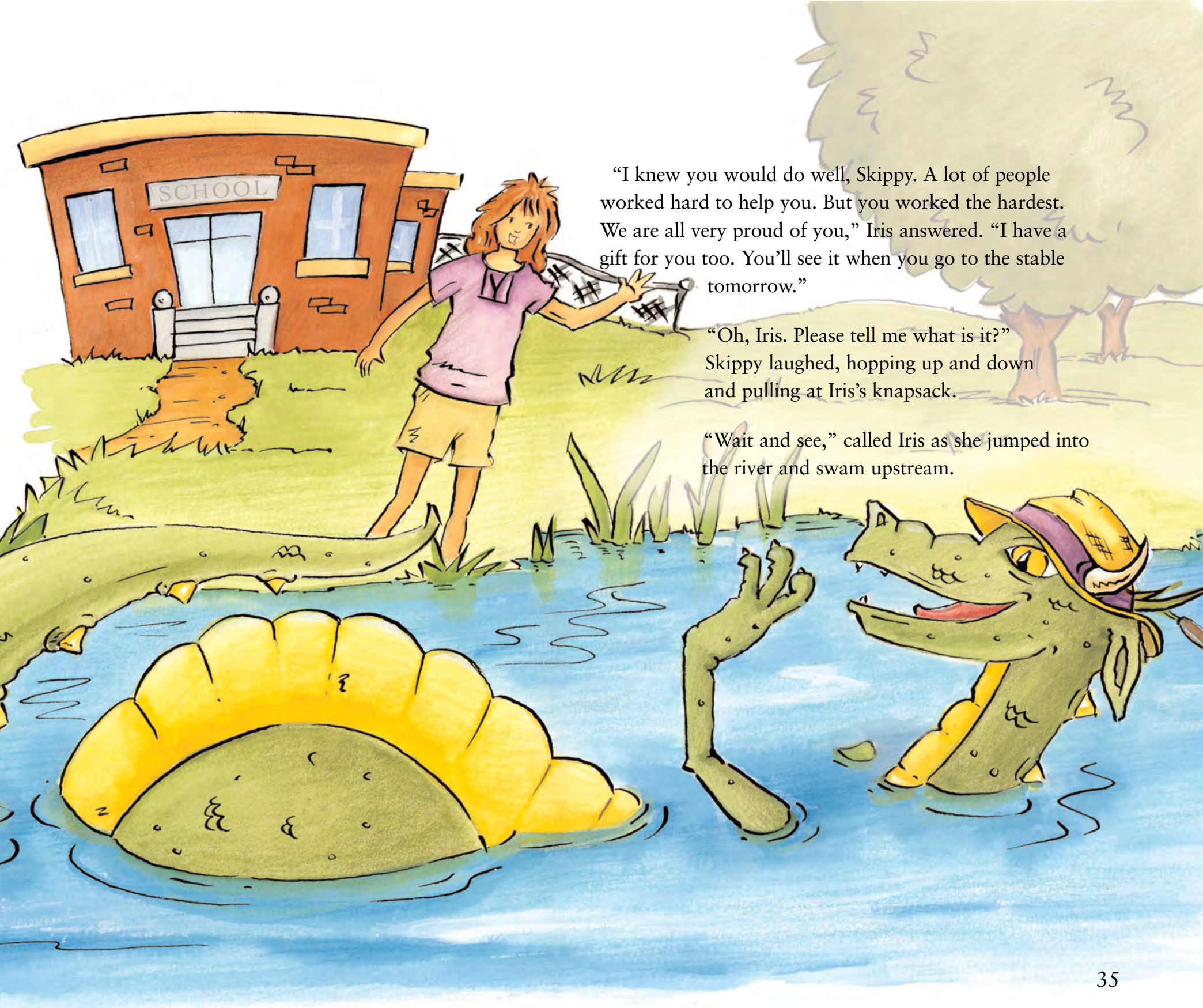
Everyone bust into applause. Skippy was so happy she felt like crying. She gave her mom a big hug and said:

“Thank you Mom for all your help.”

As Skippy was leaving she saw Iris sitting quietly under the apple tree near the playground. Skippy ran over to see her.

“Oh, Iris,” she cried. “I am so happy today. I won the prize for the student who made the most progress. It’s a book about horses. I used to really hate school. It made me feel so anxious. But now that I understand what they are teaching me, I get my work done and I really like it.”





"I knew you would do well, Skippy. A lot of people worked hard to help you. But you worked the hardest. We are all very proud of you," Iris answered. "I have a gift for you too. You'll see it when you go to the stable tomorrow."

"Oh, Iris. Please tell me what is it?" Skippy laughed, hopping up and down and pulling at Iris's knapsack.

"Wait and see," called Iris as she jumped into the river and swam upstream.

Bright and early the next morning, Skippy arrived at the stables. She had a lot to do today. She wanted to make sure that Little Ben was ready for the fair tomorrow. She was also curious to see what Iris had given her.

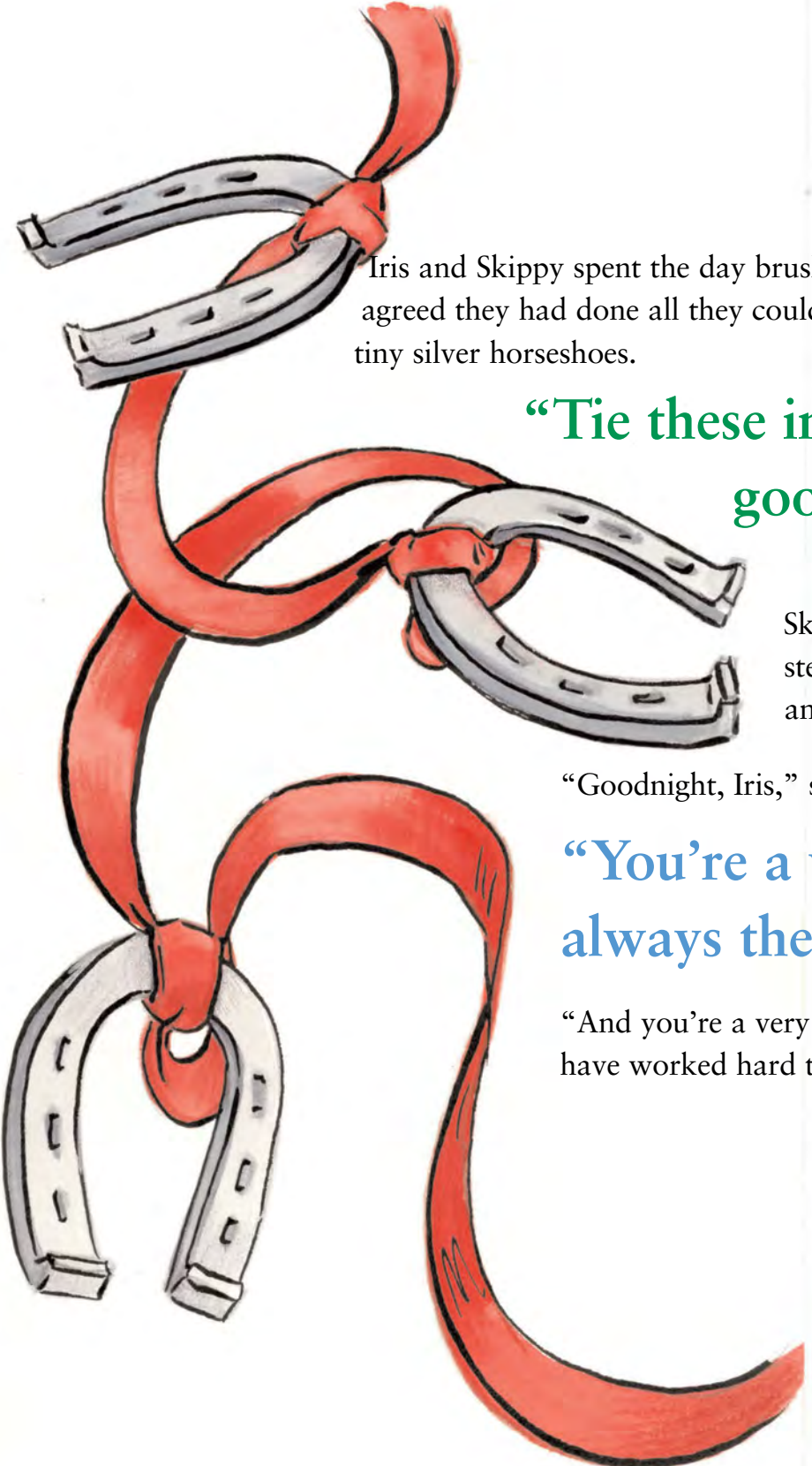
As she opened the stall door, Little Ben gave a nicker and trotted up to show Skippy his new red halter.

“Oh, Little Ben, you look beautiful,” cried Skippy, giving Little Ben a big hug.

Just at that moment, Iris appeared at the stable door.

“Iris, I love it,” cried Skippy, hugging Iris hard around her neck. “Even if Little Ben doesn’t win a prize, he’ll be the best looking horse at the show.”





Iris and Skippy spent the day brushing Little Ben until his coat shone. When Skippy agreed they had done all they could do, Iris reached up into her hat and took out three tiny silver horseshoes.

“Tie these into Little Ben’s mane for good luck,”

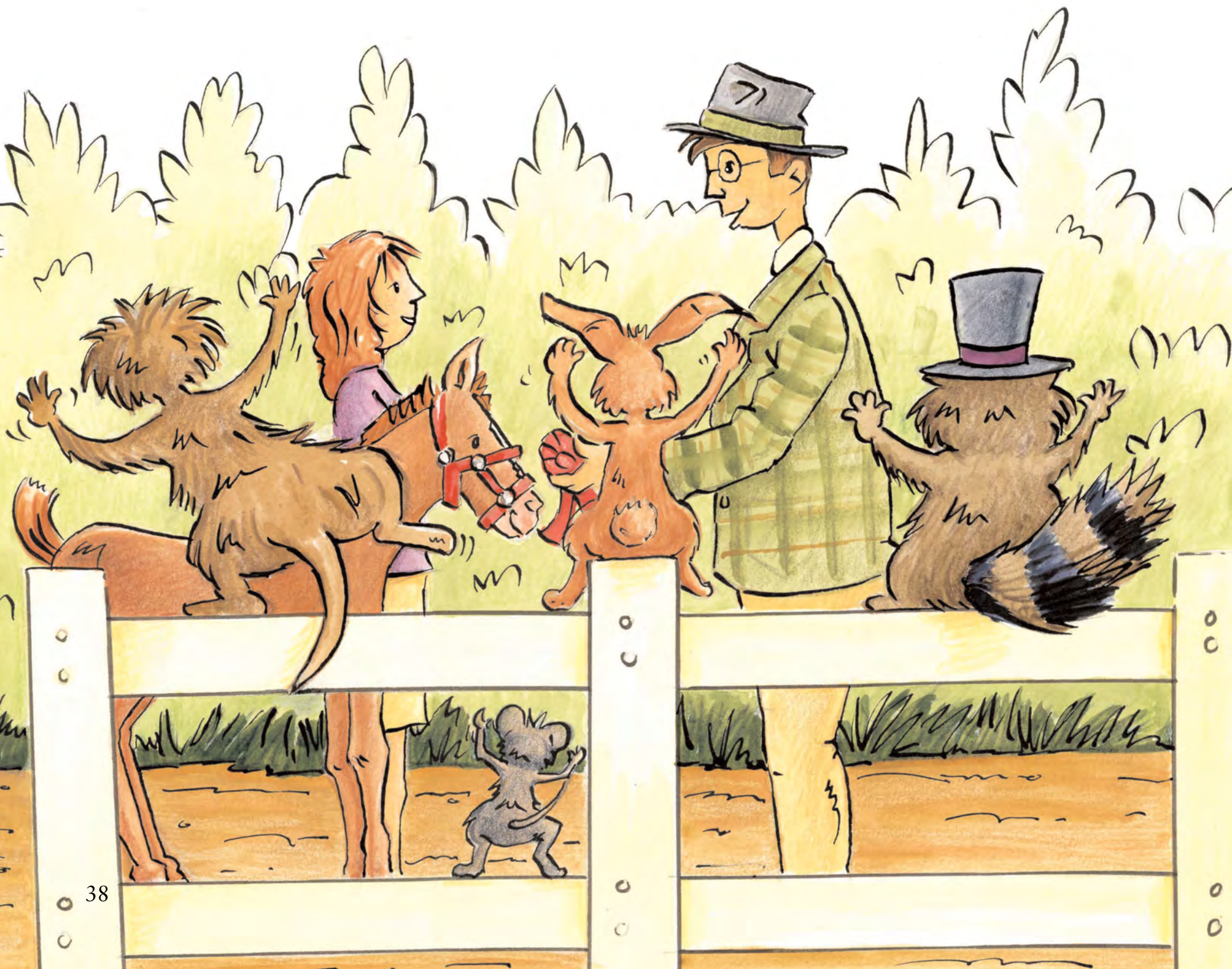
she said as she handed them to Skippy.

Skippy put the little horseshoes into Little Ben’s mane, stepped back and said. “You are beautiful Little Ben and I think we are ready for tomorrow.”

“Goodnight, Iris,” she said to Iris.

“You’re a very special friend. You’re always there when I need you.”

“And you’re a very special person, Skippy. I know Little Ben and you have worked hard this year to achieve your dreams.”



The next day, as Skippy led Little Ben into the show ring, she felt relaxed and happy. She knew that he looked beautiful. She felt sure he would do his very best. Everyone watched as she put him through his paces. He lifted his legs high and trotted proudly around the ring with Skippy. Then he stood very still while they waited the judges' decision.

As the judge came towards the horses, Skippy took a deep breath. The judge paused for a few seconds, giving all the horses' one final look. Then he walked towards Little Ben and Skippy. He smiled and hung the red ribbon on Little Ben's halter.

“Congratulations,”

he said as the crowd cheered.

Skippy threw her arms around Little Ben's neck and yelled,

“We did it, Little Ben.

We did it.”



Author-Gayle Grass

Gayle Grass is the author and publisher of the Iris the Dragon Children's Book Series. Her decision to write illustrated children's books came from the sincere belief that this medium could be used to educate and break down the stigma and fears surrounding emotional, behavioural and neurodevelopmental conditions and encourage a dialogue between children and their caregivers. The Iris the Dragon Series recognize the importance of family, school and community in promoting the potential of every child and youth, regardless of their mental health challenge. Today, Gayle lives with her husband and family on a hobby farm near Perth, Ontario.

Illustrator-Graham Ross

A graduate of the illustration program at Sheridan College in Ontario, Graham began his career as a book designer for Canadian publisher McClelland & Stewart. He then returned to his hometown of Ottawa to work as senior designer for a local firm. It was in Ottawa that Graham began his freelance illustration and graphic design career. Through his career Graham has completed illustrations for such publishers as Scholastic Canada, Orca Book Publishers and Meadowside Books of the United Kingdom, as well as the Canadian government. He lives in Merrickville, Ontario in a little log home amongst the trees and Iris' friends.