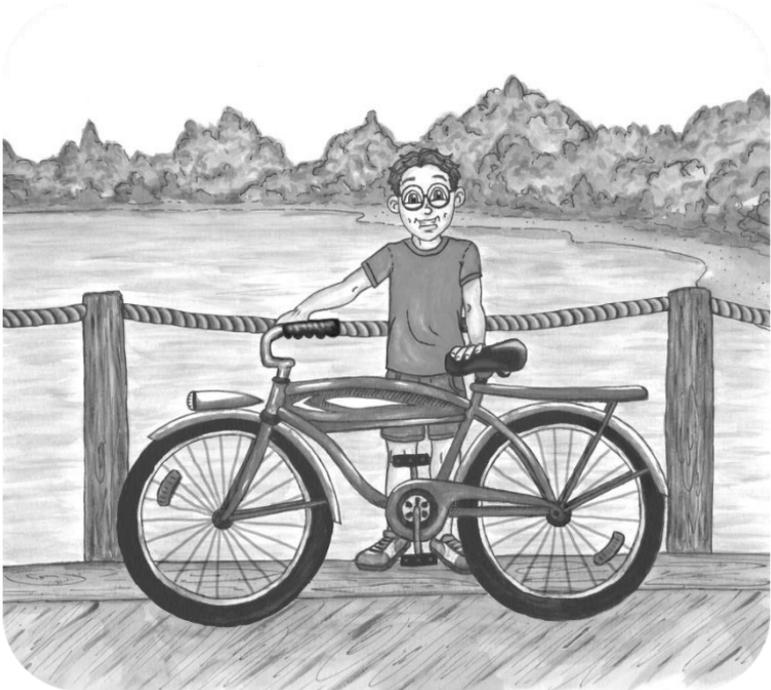


The Big Ol' Bike



Written & Illustrated by
Rachael Clarke



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First Edition



Party Time

Oliver lived in a cozy, little house on a quiet street in a small town called Little Springs. He had a short, shaggy-haired dog named Tiny who loved to cuddle. He also loved to bark like a pit bull, but hid in the hallway whenever the mailman came by.

Everything about Oliver's life seemed to be small. His hat. His footprint. His bike. He wore small, round glasses to see better, which made the kids at school call him "Bug Eyes." If that nickname wasn't bad enough, Oliver also got teased for being short and skinny for his age.

He dreamed of riding big, beautiful thoroughbreds in the fanciest horse races someday—like the Kentucky Derby. Sometimes, when he rode his bike around the neighbourhood, Oliver liked to pretend he was galloping around a racetrack instead. Sitting on

the back of a mighty steed, he'd rush toward the finish line, which was usually just a crack in the cement or a long shadow across the street. His dad said that horse riders—called jockeys—always needed to be small people. Short and light.

It was the perfect job for Oliver!



“You have such an overactive imagination,” his mom would always say.

She'd ruffle his hair, and Oliver would just smile. He didn't mind that fact at all. Imagining things was fun.

One thing he really didn't like, though, was his bike. Oliver was small, but his bike was even smaller. He'd grown out of it *last* year already, and now he looked huge sitting on top of it. Normally, Oliver would love that—since he didn't look huge very often. But this wasn't one of those times. The kids at school had started to tease him because it looked so silly.

Plus, his knees kept hitting the handlebars, leaving purple bruises behind.

He needed a new bike badly. But his parents said they couldn't afford one right now. So, instead of letting himself get sad, Oliver grew determined. If his parents didn't have enough money, then he'd help them pay for it.

He decided to save all of his weekly allowance in a special jar he'd marked, "Bike." And for extra good luck, each night before he drifted off to sleep, Oliver searched for the brightest star in the sky to wish upon. He'd squeeze his eyes shut, asking for a new bike.

Oliver hoped with all his might that someday his wish would come true.



Two weeks later, it was Oliver's birthday. A few friends and family came over for a celebration in the afternoon. It was a warm day for mid-June. Oliver's dad set up a slip n' slide with sprinklers for everyone to run through. He got totally soaked.

After devouring a table full of snacks, his parents revealed a birthday cake with eleven candles. It even had his name on it. Oliver's mom made it special, just for him.

“Happy birthday to you,”



everybody sang with big smiles. The flames went out with one blow.

The cake tasted delicious, but the best part was the red and yellow icing—just like his favourite superhero, The Flash. Nobody was quicker than The Flash. And Oliver loved anything that went fast.

When the cake was done, he opened gifts. Oliver got new socks and underwear from Mom and Dad like he did *every year (groan)*, a pair of sweet kicks, and a few other awesome toys. His best friend, Austin, gave him a Nerf blaster gun, which he'd been wanting forever.

“Thank you!” he said to Austin and to everybody who gave him a present. His smile was so huge it hurt his cheeks. Oliver spent the rest of the afternoon running through sprinklers and firing his new Nerf gun. He couldn't have asked for a better birthday.

Oliver felt super tired once all of the excitement was over. His friends had all gone home, and it was suddenly very quiet in the house. Grandma decided to

stay for supper, but she was busy helping his mom in the kitchen. Dad was nowhere to be seen, so Oliver flopped onto the couch. A little nap before supper couldn't hurt. His dog Tiny jumped up into his lap to cuddle. But before they could snuggle in and get too comfy, Oliver's parents popped back into the room.

“Oh, no, you don't!” His dad said, swooping toward the couch. “No napping yet. We have one more birthday surprise.”

He pulled Oliver to his feet, leading him to the back door.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Rachael Clarke is a former police officer turned stay-at-home mom living in Portage la Prairie, MB. She rides the twisty rollercoaster of life alongside her sport-obsessed husband, a couple of adorably mischievous boys, and two quirky dogs. Besides writing and illustrating, she enjoys photography, camping, acting, and sipping steaming cups of coffee. Oh, and cake—can't forget cake. Rachael likes to stay busy, constantly juggling writing projects from children's books to novels. Her short fiction has been published in various online magazines and anthologies under the pen name R.A. Clarke.



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