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Translating the Vanderbeeker Family

How to be a *vender* of a *beaker* of *familiarities* adapting
communication

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*To my family,
my grandmother Roberta,
and Luis Sepúlveda.*

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INTRODUCTION

Children's literature has often been underestimated, considered as a collection of books written in "simple" words and with the sole aim of teaching its readers how to speak, write and behave. Therefore, when its scope was entertaining readers, children's literature was likely to be considered as "poor" in content. In 2014, B.J. Epstein, published an article entitled "Don't Underestimate Children" where she stated that:

Literature does much more than teach basic facts or social rules. Children, like adults, have the right to see books that reflect the world around them, and the broader world, too. That means, yes, featuring different races, cultures, genders, sexual orientations, religions, abilities, classes, ages, and so on, and also exploring political, moral, physical, and emotional issues.¹

In 2017, Janice Bland (2017: Introduction) a British teacher educator in English Language and Literature Teaching, offered a distinction between poorly-crafted texts, badly simplified and over-abbreviated, and well-crafted texts, lexically dense and creatively enriching, basing her analysis on different choices of language and content and obviously considering only the second type as "authentic" literature. Both the researchers reveal how many complex elements interweave when dealing with a book written for children: they refer to the wide content which can be covered, and to a style far from being "simple". As concerns vocabulary, for instance, it needs to be rich, challenging and regulated according to the background experience of the target readers in order not to be restricted to a limited number of essential words. Otherwise, the readers' cognitive abilities might be undervalued and repressed.

As writing children's books has often been considered a second-status occupation, translating them has also been misjudged as a simple and recreational activity. However, more and more researchers are bringing to light the multifaceted and complex nature of the translating process, which even makes difficult to present an exhaustive definition.

Translated tales have enriched children's reading since the medieval period ... Who could imagine the history of children's books without Aesop's fables, the Arabian Nights, the tales of Charles Perrault, the Brothers Grimm, and Hans Christian Andersen, *The Swiss*

¹ https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/bj-epstein/children-dont-underestimate-them_b_5576802.html

Family Robinson, Pinocchio, Hide, Babar the elephant, Emil and his detectives, or Pippi Longstocking? (Lathey 2010: Introduction)

Given the fact that translating is always a matter of choice, dealing with a book written for children consists in facing numerous choices which concern with both the form and the content of a text. Children are demanding readers: they do not like useless complexities or disrespectful simplifications. Translating for children is surely no less demanding than translating for adults. Despite given limitations due to reasons of sales, it is a thrillingly creative process which hides a multitude of complexities being open to dynamic stylistic features, from word play to colourful expressions, and to every possible issue, from gender to death and difference. The adaptation of cultural markers could provide an excellent example in this regard: names, for instance, may be “foreignized” or “domesticated”. This is a thorny dilemma shared by most translators who cannot benefit from a given set of rules, ready to be applied. Therefore, they are asked to make choices based on their own image of the child, the readers’ age, the editors’ directors, and the specific characteristics of a text, such as the setting and the proximity between the source and target culture.

The translator of texts for children has traditionally remained silent on the specific challenges of the translating or the young. In the last forty years, thanks to an increased academic interest in translation for young readers [...] translators’ of children’s literature have begun to establish a separate voice, so that it is now possible to gain much cleared idea of the strategies and publishing transaction of these professionals from interviews, commentaries, and articles [...] At the same time there has been an increase in the number of instances where translators directly address child readers. (Lathey 2010: ch. 11 para. 1)

The present dissertation attempts to unravel the tangled world of translating for children, discussing the various complexities it might involve, in form and content, through the analysis of the challenges I encountered while translating *The Vanderbeekers of 141st street*, a book written for children (7 to 11 years old) by Karina Yan Glaser, released in America in 2017 and not available in Italian up to now.

In Chapter 1, I offer an analysis of children’s literature, not through its history and its chronological development, either in the American or Italian context, but by focusing on the issues which have been central in helping me to approach the numerous challenges of the translation process. Trying to find the most suitable way to approach a subject which risks being so vast as to result unnecessarily chaotic, I apply the Five Ws and How questions to my topic. I discuss *What* “children’s literature” could possibly mean, *Who*

the main actors involved are, *Why* pleasure and teaching have been considered opposite reasons to write for a young audience over the centuries, and *When* and *Where*, that is to say the contextual features, which inevitably influence all literary products.

In Chapter 2, I present the novel I translated, *The Vanderbecker Family of 141st street*, and I offer an in-depth analysis focusing on gender issues. It was extremely interesting to consider it through a feminist lens because, despite not being officially a “feminist” book, it deals with characters and situations which might challenge some gender stereotypes. According to Loredana Lipperini (2007: 30), after all the debates about equal rights and opportunities, gender roles are still deeply present in our society through the images and references spread by means of communication such as the Internet, television, advertisements and even books, which often present “super-males” and “hyper-females”, silently influencing the imagination of readers. In this regard, I propose a comparative analysis between three of the five Vanderbecker children, Isa, Jessie and Hyacinth, with Meg, Jo and Beth, three of the main characters of *Little Women*, one of the most widely discussed books for young readers in feminist terms, written by the American author Louisa May Alcott.

Finally, in Chapters 3 and 4, I examine the translating process. I highlight the major translating strategies I adopted and I look specifically at adaptation and the risks and implications in choosing whether or not to adapt linguistic and cultural elements, examining in greater depth the translation of names. On the whole I struggled between adapting the text to the Italian system from a linguistic point of view while preserving as many original elements as possible, especially cultural ones. I tried to facilitate the reader in coming into contact with a different society where people celebrate Thanksgiving (> *la festa del ringraziamento*), eat cilantro (> *coriandolo*), go to college (> *college*), pay with dollars (> *dollari*), attend an eighth grade dance (> *festa dell'ultimo anno*), and name streets according to numbers (141st street > *la 141^a strada*).

CHAPTER 1 What is Children's Literature: the Five Ws and H

Questions applied to Children's Literature

A relish for reading, or any of the fine arts, should be cultivated very early in life [...] is the most rational employment, if people seek food for the understanding, and do not read merely to remember words; or with a view to quote celebrated authors, and retail sentiments they do not understand or feel. Judicious books enlarge the mind and improve the heart. (Wollstonecraft 2017: chapter "Reading")

Over the next few afternoons Mrs Phelps could hardly take her eyes from the small girl sitting for hour after hour in the big armchair at the far end of the room with the book on her lap. [...] And a strange sight it was, this tiny dark-haired person sitting there with her feet nowhere near touching the floor, totally absorbed [...] by the spell of magic that Dickens the great story-teller had woven with his words. (Dahl 2001: 10)

Children's literature has been transparent and voiceless for a very long time. Although children have always read, a market of literary products, specifically created for them, flourished only in the second half of the 18th century, when the concept of childhood started to change dramatically. The child stopped being a little and still-imperfect man or woman to be considered an independent member of society, with specific needs and inclinations (Shavit 1986: 5) thanks to figures such as Jean Jacques Rousseau and John Locke, who are often considered as the "discoverers" of childhood (Hunt 1999: 24).

What is children's literature? "Trying to define this vast, complex and amorphous field is akin to catching an ocean in a sieve" (Philip Womack²). Defining children's literature is not an easy challenge: over the decades, researchers have made several attempts to offer as exhaustive an explanation as possible, which might embed all the complex features which are hidden under a kind of literature which is too often undervalued. Hunt, for example, questions if it might be better to use the expression "book written *by* children" or "*for* children", highlighting the fluid status of children's literature. The prepositional difference hides a key shift in meaning: for instance, considering the second formula, written *for* children, he states that there might arise a controversial issue if we think about those books also read by adults or "adult" books also read by younger readers. This dual perspective is shared by other specialists such as Oittinen and Helsing;

² <https://www.the-tls.co.uk/articles/shifting-shape-childrens-literature/>

Hellsing additionally refers to another important feature, interest, widening the discourse on this literature to all those products, from TV shows to radio presentations, which are produced for or by children. Always focusing on interest, Inokuma (1988 in Hunt 1999: 25) defines children's literature with reference to all those books which children feel attracted to and in which they can identify themselves. Talking about "identification", he underlines a key word which is linked by Cohen (1988 in Hunt 1999: 25) to that of active participation on the part of the young readers and by Harding to the concept of empathy, defined as "an imaginative insight into what another person may be feeling, and the contemplation of possible human experiences" (Harding 1967 in Hunt 1999: 26). Emotivity is, indeed, another major feature of children's literature, as books are able to make the feelings of their readers stronger and more intense, touching their unconscious, their deepest thoughts, sensations and emotions (Oittinen 2000:65). On the whole, it is not possible to reduce children's literature to a specific kind of text with recurrent and fixed features as books may be catalogued according to different parameters, such as age and genre. By way of illustration, Seuling (2004: 13), offers an exhaustive list of book types: baby books (0 to 15 months), board books (1 to 3 years), fiction and nonfiction picture books both for younger readers (2 to 7 years) and older ones (8 to 12 years), easy-to-read books (5 to 7 years), middle-grade fiction and nonfiction (8 to 12 years), young adult fiction and nonfiction (12 years and up), novelty books and poetry. All these types try to respond to the needs of the assumed audience and, thus, include specific features which should not be underestimated by editors, writers and translators. For instance, readers of middle-grade fictions are eager for "action and a solid story with good tension and a logical development of events" (Seuling 2004: 17) and are gradually becoming less interested in pictures.

Although "children's books are characterised by strong materials – good plots, rich setting, well-developed characters, important themes, and artistic styles [...] bold and imaginative language" (Glazer and Williams 1979 in Hunt 1999: 22), children's literature might be considered as an "underestimated art" (Lathey 2016: 1). It is often shaded by an illusion of simplicity while it might be demanding from an intellectual and linguistic point of view due to the possible complexity and diversity of form and content. Talking about the classics, Grilli states:

Quello che i classici hanno saputo dire [...] che l'essere umano è qualcosa di più complesso di quanto la società in cui vive tenda a fargli credere, che crescere è un'avventura non scontata e spesso difficile, che la vita è piena sia di ombre cupe che di meraviglie. (Grilli 2012: 21)

Children's literature has often been considered inferior to that destined for adults, regarded as the canonical one, and it has been excluded by being part of the cultural heritage. As concerns writers, for example, they have often been put under the spotlight and received as an important part of the literary establishment if they were authors of books for adults, while, they have seldom been considered "serious" and "invited" to choose pen names, in order not to jeopardize their reputation as professionals, if they were writing for children (Shavit 1986: 37). A few academic courses, as well as special prizes, have been created only recently and, although their scope is to demonstrate the quality of children's literature, they are symbols which do reinforce its "being-different" status as they signal its being something different, "other", from the "real" literature which needs special criteria to be evaluated (Shavit 1986: 35).

Children's literature exists as literature: that it has forms and genres, an imaginative scope, a mastery of figurative language, an enduring cast of characters, a self-conscious sense of authorship, a poetics, a politics, a prose style. (Lerer 2009: 11)

Researchers such as Wall, Shavit (in Oittinen 2000: 65) and Hunt (1999: 16) have highlighted the actual independency of children's literature, which paradoxically resides in specific features which make it very different from literature for adults and which cause it to constitute a completely different genre: double address, ambiguity, power relations and internationality. The first three elements seem to recur in the words of many researchers and all refer to the fact that this literature does not merely respond to its supposed main addresses, children, but also to those who actually manoeuvre and control what has become today a "fabbrica delle storie attenta alle richieste del mercato" (Grilli 2012: 13): adults. Many children's books exist on two levels: the symbolic one, more demanding and refined, especially from the point of view of the evoked layers of meaning, which address to the adult audience; and the literal one, more conventional and less ambiguous which is addressed to the young readers (Oittinen 2000: 64). By way of illustration, *Winnie-the-Pooh* by A. A. Milne raises challenging philosophic issues, far from banal, such as those related to what is essential to enjoy in life and how friendship, community and self-awareness might be central for everyone's well-being and survival.

“Hallo!” said Piglet, “what are *you* doing?” “Hunting,” said Pooh. “Hunting what?” “Tracking something,” said Winnie-the-Pooh very mysteriously. “Tracking what?” said Piglet, coming closer. “That’s just what I asked myself. I ask myself, What?” “What do you think you’ll answer?” “I shall have to wait until I catch up with it,” said Winnie-the-Pooh. (Milne 2005: 36)

Yet, although this duality might be regarded as an enriching element which challenges texts to disclose their “hidden possibilities”, such as flexibility and unpredictability (Oittinen 2000: 64), it seems to advantage one part over the other. Adults – parents, teachers, librarians, educators, editors, publishers, illustrators – are often considered as those who are to be attracted and persuaded: they have control on the publication and selling of children’s books. They use this power to decide what is – or “should be” – better for children on the basis of their personal or societal “construction” of childhood, which does not necessarily take into account the tastes of the young readers. This hides a paradox: to be appreciated by adults, children’s books do not just need to be accepted by children; moreover, children and adults have forcibly “different and incompatible tastes” (Shavit 1986 :37). This leads Rose (1984 in Lathey 2016: 2) to talk about the “impossibility of children’s fiction”, while Lathey (2016: 5) states that writing, as well as translating, for children is a political act: the authors of the original text, or of the target one, need to decide whether to be in line with the investment sanctioned by government in the education of its young citizens or to use their literary products as a subversive medium, a way to go against societal rules and values risking an act of censorship due to ideological pressures.

Simplification seems to have become a recurrent pattern in the creation of literary products for young readers. In this regard, according to Grilli (2012: 11), another possible definition of children’s literature is that of an industry, which has grown gradually for the last twenty years: the titles and the publishing houses have multiplied, overtaking those of adult literature. In the meantime, its content, form and design have been adjusted, often towards extremely simplified versions, to fit the pressures of “editorial practices, international trends and financial considerations” (Lathey 2016: 127) based on the market rules and the purchase probability scales. As a consequence, it has often become the symbol of a culture which aims more and more at entertaining its addresses in a “neutral” way, without any kind of emotive or physical reaction (Grilli 2012: 12).

As mentioned above, internationality is another distinctive feature of children's literature which can be considered a "world literature" (Lerer 2009: 11). Works such as the Grimms' stories, the Harry Potter saga, Astrid Lindgren's series of Pippi Longstocking's adventures are some of the classics which, having had and still having a world wide range, are the perfect examples of an "international" children's literature, "the literature of one part of the world for children all over the world", embedded "in the levelling process of globalism, (and) increasingly losing (its) culture-specific nature" (O'Sullivan 2005: 110).

Classics of children's literature have produced subjects and characters that, like those of the old myths and fairy tales, encourage liberal treatment. That is to say, they are both unique and universal. They can culturally and historically be changed, transplanted to other language areas and other times and media with the appropriate alterations, without entirely losing their identity. (O'Sullivan 2005: 113)

The discourse on the internationality of children's literature is inevitably linked to how much context is important for its characterization and development: "where" and "when" a book destined for children is written, are coordinates highly central as the cultural values, ideas, images, symbols as well as stereotypes and taboos, which define a specific society, cannot be escaped. In the following paragraphs, I will discuss the issue of context, focusing on the historical and cultural development of the concept of childhood, which is inseparable from the history and success of children's literature (Lerer 2009: 1).

We had a wonderful childhood there, we played and played and played everyday, very much. We were very happy and I think we had all of us had a lot of imagination which we used really often. [...] we had to work, we had to begin at the age of seven years old and then, when we grow older, we (have) had to do our tasks as well as the grown-ups but we had a lot of time to play [...] we were allowed to be children. (Astrid Lindgren³)

Childhood and children's literature are both relatively recent phenomena which have been changing since the end of the 18th century, when a completely new image of the child was created. The concept of "childhood" is rather difficult to define: it is not an objective entity, a linear and universal concept, which enters in framed conventions, but it has changed continually, following the transformations of the societal perceptions.

³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A9FS-r8LWAw>

However, it is fundamental to understand children's literature, as adults construct both the child and, consequently, the literature destined for them (Hunt 1999: 15).

The idea of childhood is not to be confused with affection for children: it corresponds to an awareness of the particular nature of childhood, that particular nature which distinguishes that child from the adult, even the young adult. (Arès 1973 cited in Hunt 1999: 17)

Until the 17th century children were not considered different from adults and were regarded as “little” men and women with no special needs and, thus, no education systems or books were specifically created for them (Shavit 1986: 5). In ancient societies, Roman and Greek children were educated with texts, lexically and grammatically adapted from the canon, such as by Homer or Aesop, to train their memory and acting skills with the scope of performance: they had to become good actors, ready to take their roles in society as citizens, parents, teachers and rulers (Lerer 2009: 18). In medieval society, childhood was not recognised as a stage of life and parents were not interested in “investing” for the education of their children due to the high rate of child mortality. Children suffered neglect, abuse and indifference (Shavit 1986: 5). Then, during the 17th century, the status of the child was culturally recognised and its needs were legitimated: a polarization between the world of adults and that of children occurred and books, toys and dresses, previously shared by the two groups, became the monopoly of children. This was thanks to drastic changes in the social conditions of many societies, such as the Industrial Revolution, the ascent of the bourgeois class and the drop in child mortality. Children started to be regarded as innocent and sweet creatures with angelic qualities, and educators and moralists began to state that they needed to be isolated from any risk of corruption, such as the company of the adults, and their spiritual well-being became a sort of obsession for the societies. In order to safeguard their pure souls, they had to be strictly educated and disciplined; thus, organised educational systems were created, flourishing by the second half of the 19th century, and books started to be used as the first pedagogic vehicles, providing the basis for a new highly profitable market and, consequently, a framework for canonized children's literature, whose ideology was carefully surveyed (Shavit 1986: 7).

During the 20th century, other cultural revolutions – radio, cinema, television, mass production and Internet – produced other deep transformations in children's literature, which started to introduce experimental and innovative elements, while preserving an

educational value. For example, in the 1940s, Astrid Lindgren's *Pippi Longstocking* was published and it included "transgressive" elements, such as the desire to "escape" societal conventions, while *The Little Prince* by Saint-Exupéry introduced philosophical elements with its existential symbolism and textual refinements (Bacchetti et al. 2009: 18). Since the aftermath of the Second World War, new subgenres have been created, like fantasy, crime and science-fiction, and controversial themes have been introduced, such as the "taboo" of poo in *La bambina della cacca* by Bianca Pitzorno. Despite the introduction of elements previously avoided, many books written for them continue to protect their readers by themes and concepts which are thought to corrupt their minds and destroy their historical "innocence", while they might actually prepare them to deal with the complexity of the world spinning all around them. Darkness and danger, for example, are only two of the many elements which have long been censored despite being recurrent features, especially in fairy tales. The complete versions of works such as some of the brothers Grimm stories and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* by Roald Dahl, were only published a few years ago. Their first editions were harshly criticised, and immediately adjusted, because of some "disturbing" elements, considered too gruesome, horrifying and violent. In "How Some Children Played at Slaughtering" by the Grimm brothers, for example, a butcher kills a pig in front of his sons (Richter 2015: 326). However, danger and darkness have not disappeared and "sometimes, there's little assurance of rosy outcome, but by reading about perilous situations in faraway places children can work through the challenges in their own lives" (Richter 2015: 329).

Dangerously dark imagery continues to inspire contemporary authors [...] Danger doesn't have to be present explicitly in the form of evil witches or warring siblings. It can be something more ambiguous, like global warming or substance addiction." (Richter 2015: 330)

Coraline by Neil Gaiman, for example, has been defined by Terry Pratchett as a "delicate horror (which sends) a shiver down your spine" (Gaiman 2012) and by Diana Wynne Jones as "the most splendidly original, weird, and frightening book [...] full of things children will love" (Gaiman 2012). It might be considered one of those contemporary books which propose danger again, in an extremely inventive way, as an instructive – and amusing – tool which reminds children of the uncertainty and complexity of everyday life.

She looked a little like Coraline's mother. [...] Only her skin was white as paper. Only she was taller and thinner. Only her fingers were too long, and they never stopped moving, and her dark red fingernails were curved and sharp. [...] And then she turned around. Her eyes were big black buttons. [...] "I'm your other mother," said the woman. "Go and tell your other father that lunch is ready" [...] "It wasn't the same here without you. But we knew you'd arrive one day, and then we could be a proper family. Would you like some more chicken?" It was the best chicken that Coraline had ever eaten. (Gaiman 2012: 25)

The child represents one of the many "whos" involved in the market of children's literature. Leaving to Chapter 3 the analysis of the role of translators, in the following paragraphs I will present the profile of the child reader, who is "so frequently present in the imagination of children's publishers, editors, authors and translators, and yet so rarely consulted" (Lathey 2016: 138).

The 'children' of 'children's literature' are constituted as specialised ideas of 'children', not necessarily related in any way to other 'children' (for instance those within education, psychology, sociology, history, art or literature), and the 'literature' of 'children's literature' is a special idea of 'literature', not necessarily related to any other 'literature'. (Hunt 1999: 16)

Children are very peculiar and challenging readers, especially because of the wide generational gap which separate them from authors and translators. According to Postman (1983 in Hunt 1999: 42), adults are more cynical, rational and accustomed to "endure" as they have a wider experience and knowledge of the violence and tragedy in life; children, instead, lack this "wide" experience as they can only compare new facts to what they have already seen or heard. Thus, writers, translators, illustrators and editors need to find the child in themselves, to evoke their childhood memories in order to efficiently communicate and create an "authentic" connection with their demanding audience.

I am so childish. I suppose I have a bit of a child inside me; so and I remember those things very well, very clearly. I can remember how it was to be a child, how a child feels and how he reacts. (Astrid Lindgren⁴)

Young readers might be considered as still-amorphous creatures, who are going through several stages of development – social, physical, emotional, intellectual, moral, and spiritual – in a constant search of personality and language, that is to say: identity (Oittinen 2000: 15). They are readers who do not merely acquire some information, more or less new, but also respond to them and both authors and translators need to know who is the implied child reader and how he/she might respond during the reading process

⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A9FS-r8LWAw>

(Hunt 1999: 81). This is especially true because of the fact that “reading is not the discovering of meaning [...] but the creation of it” (Hunt 1999: 84) and children are expected to actively and creatively participate in the interpretation of the plurality of meanings, which are extremely fragile entities, within literary works. Despite their age and literacy level, children have a background knowledge which inevitably interferes and individually guides every reading experience as each of them unconsciously combines his/her own hopes and fears, his/her own way and view of life (Oittinen 2000: 18). Reading means becoming emotionally and physically involved into something and children, who abound with insatiable curiosity, are extremely receptive towards everything they read, especially when presented in an honest, fearless, clear and respectful way, which does not deprive them from the pleasure of “words that give them a hard time” (Hunt 1999: 19). Children might be interrogative or acquiescent but, on the whole, they appreciate what looks and sounds different and love the clumsiness, artificiality and awkwardness of some names and terms, as they have the emotive power to make their reading experience unique and memorable (Lathey 2016 :139). Reading does not involve a passive understanding through the repetition of something given, but the intellectual freedom to appreciate and be motivated to compose new meanings and be open to the “‘experienciveness’ of texts which includes its verbalization, symbolism, readability and appreciation (Hunt 1999: 19).

Children’s background knowledge and personality influence the interpretation of the meaning of what they read; yet, the form and content of literary texts contribute to shape and colour children’s intellectual and emotive responses. According to Grilli (2012: 12), contemporary children’s literature often shows a tendency to sacrifice the quality and richness of content, form and design in order to keep up with the over-production of a continuously demanding and transforming market. This attitude risks to intoxicate children as it overexposes them to superficiality, mediocrity and banality, influencing not only what they are but also what they might become in the future.

It seems to me [...] a betrayal of the young reader, to get out of the difficulty by putting down the adult’s burden of knowledge and experience, and speaking childishly; but the need for comprehensibility imposes on emotional obliqueness, and indirectness of approach [...] shaped and sustained by the pressure of adult emotion, present but invisible.” (Walsh 1997 in Lathey 2016: 3)

In order to investigate the issue of “respect” in greater detail, in the following sections I will analyse “how” and “why” to write for young readers, that is to say features of style and content which should not be undervalued or minimised.

Si deve semplificare il linguaggio, evitando i paroloni e le frasi troppo articolate, o è giusto scrivere come si sente e lasciare che il lettore inesperto si abitui a decodificare qualsiasi tipo di testo scritto? [...] si può parlare di tutto-tutto o ci sono argomenti che è meglio evitare? Risposta unanime: si affronta qualsiasi argomento ma attraverso modi che siano accessibili al livello di esperienza del lettore, cercando di non rendere la lettura ostica ma nemmeno stucchevole e forzatamente “infantile”. (Salvi 2011: 53)

As stated above, the apparent “simplicity” of children’s literature is merely a shared illusion. Writing for children hides an expressive potential which is sometimes restrained by authors, who seem to feel obliged to use a specific and fixed vocabulary, style and structure – lexis and grammar, figurative language and cohesive elements. These are linked to recurrent codes and patterns which are attributed to the narrative options they can choose between, such as fantasy and realism (Hunt 1999: 56). Writing and reading represent two different moments of a communicative act where language has a central role: it shows how a culture constructs the forms and meanings of “its” reality and it enables people to share and compare their experiences, satisfying a need which is shared by most human beings: being part of something, such as a group or a community (Hunt 1999: 57). This exchange of meanings and experiences is a core element of children’s literature, where readers – at least the younger ones – need to become aware that every intellectual and emotional experience has boundaries which can be extended, especially when getting “in touch” with other individualities, and “language can make present the felt experiences of people living in other places and at other times, thus enabling a reader to define his or her own subjectivity in terms of perceived potentialities and differences” (Hunt 1999: 58).

Children do not need to be protected by the multifaceted reality they live in: they can deal with all types of themes – violence, homosexuality, abuse, death and love – but writers need to find the proper way to do that, that is to say to choose a language which is “conscious” and “meaningful” (Sossi 2007: 11) and shaped according to the readers’ age and expectations. Seuling (2005: 87) offers a stylistic analysis of children’s books according to the age of the readers and, although any process of categorization threatens the importance of “subjectivity”, it might be interesting to include it in the present

discussion, which aims at introducing the analysis of the translation of a book destined for readers in the middle grades, ranging from 7 to 11 years old. Readers of this age group are not merely interested in “curioser and curioser” (Carroll 2001: 44) elements but they want to know the reasons why things happen, and the effects which the actions of the characters have on the outcome of the story. They are living a period of their life packed with questions and doubts which desperately require answers and clarifications, and they might consider literature as an alternative way to look for them. Action is fundamental: readers need to perceive the movement and involvement of “something” which is actually happening and which engages them completely. This might be reflected in the rhythm of the story whose melody has the power to throw its readers in a whirling vortex of emotions, dreams and fantasies. which need to be adapted to the readers’ expectations in order to be successful (Salvi 2011: 59). Yet, writers can use rhythm as an experimental tool and often use punctuation to express their creativity: for example, Salvi (2011: 65) states that she forms sentences free from too many punctuation marks, such as semicolons, she is intrigued by the effects evoked by dashes and she prefers to use italics to give emphasis to words or for ironic effects.

Stylistic features such as crisp dialogues, stimulating ideas and terms, intricacies of plot and character development, as well as descriptions and conflictual elements, need to be calibrated to pose a challenge, tough but not impossible to overcome for the readers, who need to feel engaged and stimulated but not defeated from the start. Dialogues have an excitingly creative potential (Salvi 2011: 62): writers need to shape them according to the specific speakers and free them from moral lessons, which can arise indirectly from the development of the plot but not directly from the words of characters (Salvi 2011: 64). Conflict (Seuling 2005: 97) is represented through obstacles which characters have to overcome and gives “substance” to the story: readers need to follow the characters making decisions and showing problem-solving skills in order to demonstrate that they can handle the challenge and “justify” the happy ending. Thus, the audience needs to identify with “full, rich, flesh-and-blood” (Seuling 2005: 89), believable profiles which enhance the credibility of the story and make readers share hopes, successes and feelings. “Even when you write fantasy, you must do it convincingly, by grounding it in the familiar” (Seuling 2005: 91).

Anne's subsequent adventures, awkward scrapes, aesthetic hyperventilations and temper tantrums are both touching and amusing, as she grows from ugly-duckling waif to talented and beautiful swan [...] its dark underside: this is what gives Anne its frenetic, sometimes quasi-hallucinatory energy, and what makes its heroine's idealism and indignation so poignantly convincing. (Margaret Atwood⁵)

Descriptions (Seuling 2005: 96) need to be informative and full of vivid and precise details. The temperament of readers of this age group is volatile and restless; thus, descriptions need to be fragmented and inserted between blocks of dialogues. Moreover, they need to include only the elements which are essential for the understanding of the story in order to avoid bored responses on the part of readers. However, it is possible to find some literary exceptions of long and meticulous descriptions, especially when the elements listed are rather peculiar and hide an ironic intent such as in the case of *History of a Seagull and the Cat Who Taught her to Fly* by Luis Sepulveda, where two pages are devoted to the description of a very bizarre bazar.

In the three houses, joined by narrow stairways, there were nearly a million objects – among them, some worthy of special note: 7,200 hats with floppy brims that wouldn't blown away by the wind; 160 wheels dizzy from sailing round and round the world; 245 ships' lights that penetrated the thickest pea-soup fogs; 12 engine-order telegraphs battered by the ham hands of irate captains; 256 compasses that never veered from North; 6 wooden life-size elephants; 2 stuffed giraffes posed as if surveying the savannah; 1 stuffed polar bear in whose belly lay the right hand of a Norwegian explorer [...] (Sepulveda 2016: 35-36)

Together with action, middle grade readers need suspense and humour which hook them to the story without giving away too much information which might anticipate important plot developments. Humour might not to be considered too difficult to be handled as it is present in children's everyday life. The *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* series by Jeff Kinney might be a representative example of this.

It's too much pressure to be on your best behavior for a whole month. The most I can really handle is six or seven days in a row. So if they moved Thanksgiving to the week before Christmas, it would be fine by me [...] the thing that REALLY makes me nervous is this whole Santa issue. The fact that he can see you when you're sleeping and knows when you're awake really creeps me out. So I've started wearing sweatpants to bed because I really don't need Santa seeing me in my underwear. (Kinney 2012: 1)

Language is another element which needs to be authentic: characters are expected to say things and show their personalities and background in coherence with the context of the story (Seuling 2005: 98). Moreover, they are expected to use expressions and words

⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2008/mar/29/fiction.margaretatwood>

which fit different situations – and social conventions – and which might range from familiar to less familiar, in order to sound recognizable to the readers, especially when the story is set in the present. Young characters are expected to adopt the register of youth, while adults use more or less formal words and expressions, according to situations. For example, in social novels, if the plot is set in the suburbs of a big city, young characters cannot adopt linguistic expressions different from those used on the streets by their peers (Salvi 2011: 54), rich in slang, swear words, abbreviations and wordplay.

Although the style of children’s literature is open to linguistic experiments and cannot be pushed into a specific set of rules, Hunt (1999: 64) recognizes some elements which seem to recur. The narration is usually in the first person and the story is told in the present tense. These features are adopted to create an illusion of immediacy and instantaneity to readers who are invited not to depart from the present moment of the story and to suppress any attempt to interpretation or inference: the “narrative voice (is the one) which interprets the scene for the benefit of the readers” (Hunt 1999: 64). The strategy of focalisation is another recurrent element as texts tend to have only one “focaliser”, the child, who makes easier for readers to align themselves with his or her point of view. Finally, conversations tend to be represented as direct speech dialogues – reported speech acts are rarely adopted (Hunt 1999: 65) – and, the register used is readily identifiable to the audience, as stated above (Salvi 2011: 61).

The last issue I would like to discuss, investigating the boundless realm of children’s literature is the “why”s, the reasons for writing for children, a question which has always been influenced by the societal consideration of reading activities. A long-lasting debate has highlighted two main purposes: *docere et delectare*, to teach and to entertain (Lerer 2009: 11).

Few [families] in children’s literature are as engaging or amusing as the Vanderbeekers... Beautifully written... wildly entertaining.⁶

CORALINE is by turns creepy and funny, bittersweet and playful. A book that can be read quickly and enjoyed deeply.⁷

Pleasure has been linked to the reading activity only in recent times. Books for children have historically been used as tools to save the corruptible minds of these

⁶ <http://www.karinaglaser.com/vanderbeekers>

⁷ <https://www.neilgaiman.com/works/Audio/Coraline>

innocent angel-like creatures and instruct them to be “proper” members of society. They have often offered – if not imposed – images destined to show what it might mean to be a boy or a girl. They have worked as locked safes of advice which were to help children to act as “social, moral beings” (Lerer 2009: 152), labelling awkwardness, bashfulness and ineptitude as the first social vices to carefully avoid: “what books do is educate the reader as they educate their hero” (Lerer 2009: 154). Moreover, they have been used to educate children on linguistic correctness, “a union of good sense and virtue, spoken well” (Lerer 2009: 153). By way of illustration, the classical adventure novels of the 19th century are full of tools and names for those tools, which were expected to delight boys and to offer them a structured framework to help them being prepared as future leaders, protectors and conquerors of an expanding imperialistic system (Lerer 2009: 154). As concerns girls, canonical books “have shaped the social vision of female identity” (Lerer 2009: 229) as they have played a central role in educating girls to focus on domesticity, repress their intimate desires and act as if performing on stages their fixed roles of daughters, sisters, mothers or wives. Adults have often considered children as naïve and illogical subjects, who needed a sensitive guide and an education, and have embarked themselves on a mission consisting in censoring and denigrating all those elements which could infect this assumed purity (Oittinen 2000: 66).

Over the last twenty-five years, children’s literature has changed from being adult-oriented to child-oriented, focusing more on the way in which children and adolescents might look at the world around them (Sossi 2007: 11). Moral messages and pedagogic intentions have been questioned as the primary reasons to write for children and more and more researchers and writers have stressed the importance of aesthetical and recreational purposes (Oittinen 2000: 63). As stated by Hunt: “most common view of children’s literature is that the books have progressed steadily from didacticism to freedom, or from strictness to corruption” (Hunt 1995, cited in Alston 2008: 73). Some specialists even “accuse” pedagogy of denaturing this literature and restraining its artistical and innovative potential. Tabbert (1980 in Oittinen 2000: 65) distinguishes between didactic texts, which do not give readers the license to fill in the deliberate gaps, and creative texts, which welcome a certain degree of uncertainty and invite readers to take an active role in the reading experience.

Leggere è come giocare con i Lego: più mattoncini si hanno e si sa come legarli insieme e più belle saranno le nostre costruzioni. (Elisabetta Gnone⁸)

Helsing (1963 in Oittinen 2000: 65) proposes a distinction between poor art, merely pedagogic, and all good art which “is intrinsically pedagogic [...] (and) can teach the child, language, orientation to time and place, and social orientation [...] activate and allure the child’s creative powers and strengthen her/his emotional life”. Thus, children’s literature should not be intended primarily in a pedagogic sense but it should be recognized as having various functions such as entertaining, didactic, informative and therapeutic. Books need to be offered as an opportunity for readers to flee to the colourful and adventurous realm of the imagination, to discover the socializing power of language and the importance of pleasure and recreation in their everyday life (Bacchetti et al. 2009: 54).

Il nuovo lettore [...] assegna alla lettura un ruolo più di interiorizzazione, di impegno personale di “cura di sé”, di riflessione e di pausa lenta rispetto ai cari compiti della propria quotidianità [...] la lettura (che) si propone: più libera, più personalizzata, ma al tempo stesso più attenta, più interpretativa, più riflessiva. (Bacchetti et al. 2009: 51)

Entertainment might become corruptive when it is sterile, when its function is to prevent readers from taking things seriously, from avoiding the effort to meditate on thoughts and emotions which can be evoked (Grilli 2012: 11). Yet, “while the reader is being entertained, he can also be warned, persuaded, or educated. Rarely does a moralistic story break through into popular acceptance, unless the author has enough talent to pull the materials away from the didactic approach and make it something more than a sermon” (Seuling 2005: 92). Entertainment and education are often regarded as the opposite of each other, and every kind of dichotomy makes think about an excluding relationship between a limited and established number of possibilities. The purpose of children’s literature should not be regarded as a unilateral choice between two different options, educating or entertaining, but as a “possibility”, a way to give readers the opportunity to play an active role in the reading process. Choice is a complex and multifaceted concept inextricably linked to that of freedom. Children need to freely “choose” how to react to a text, what to retain from it and whether to retain something. They need to be considered more than passive receivers of a market product which happens to be “literary”. They need to be allowed to construct meanings independently,

⁸ <http://loggioneletterario.it/2019/03/intervista-elisabetta-gnone/>

as it is a process which is at the basis of every act of communication and, thus, also of the writer-reader one. As a consequence, they might also choose to be both informed and amused by a book, although in different proportions according to personal or contextual factors.

La liberazione ha bisogno di una possibilità di partecipazione [...] rendere partecipi della liberazione, e quindi di non fare che la liberazione sia un'attività degli uni e una passività degli altri, ma che sia un intreccio, una condivisione, un'accoglienza e un lasciare spazio, un permettere che l'altro trovi un suo spazio, e non preordinare uno spazio per l'altro. (Canevaro 2020: 46)

I would like to conclude the present chapter, which briefly introduces the kaleidoscopic complexity of children's literature, by citing the ten rights of readers mentioned by the French writer and professor of literature Daniel Pennac in his book *The Rights of the Reader*, a text which defends the freedom from the part of readers – of all ages – to choose what, where, when, who, how and why reading.

1. The right not to read
2. The right to skip
3. The right not to finish a book
4. The right to read it again
5. The right to read anything
6. The right to mistake a book for real life
7. The right to read anywhere
8. The right to dip in
9. The right to read out aloud
10. The right to be quiet

(Pennac 2006)

CHAPTER 2 The Vanderbecker family: content analysis

“Listen”, Mr. Wonka said, “I’m an old man. I’m much older than you think. I can’t go on for ever. I’ve got no children of my own, no family at all. So who is going to run the factory when I get too old to do it myself? *Someone’s* got to keep it going – if only for the sake of the Oompa-Loompas.” [...] “There is no time for arguments!” cried Mr. Wonka. “We must go at once and fetch the rest of the family – Charlie’s father and his mother and anyone else that’s around! They can all live in the factory from now on!” (Dahl 2001: 185,186)

Matilda leapt into Miss Honey’s arms and hugged her, and Miss Honey hugged her back, and then the mother and father and brother were inside the car and the car was pulling away with the tyres screaming. The brother gave a wave through the rear window, but the other two didn’t even look back. Miss Honey was still hugging the tiny girl in her arms [...] (Dahl 2007: 212)

The Vanderbeekers of 141st street is the debut novel of the American writer Karina Yan Glaser, who lives in Harlem, New York City, and loves to play an active role in her community. It is a book aimed at children from 7 to 11, it was released in October 2017 and it has already been translated into French and German but never into Italian, at least up to now. It rapidly became a bestseller and it was followed by two sequels: *The Vanderbeekers and the Hidden Garden*, released in September 2018 and *The Vanderbeekers to the Rescue*, released in September 2019. *The Vanderbeekers Lost and Found* will be released in September 2020.

The story is set in Harlem, a neighbourhood in the norther section of New York which is a well-known cultural and artistical centre: during the so-called “Harlem Renaissance” it became the “symbol for international black city”⁹ and artists from all disciplines and corners of the world moved there to join its “swift, bright, funny, rollicking, and gay”¹⁰ atmosphere. The Vanderbecker family live on 141st street, in “a humble red brownstone with a weathervane that (spins) on windy days” (Glaser 2017: 18) which is never “calm, tidy, boring and predictable” (Glaser 2017: 18), buzzing with the continuous hustle and bustle of the five little Vanderbeekers. Isa, Jessie, Oliver, Hyacinth and Laney are the “heroes” of the story: Isa is a violinist with leadership inclinations and a great career waiting for her; Jessie is a promising scientist who uses gumdrops and wooden toothpicks

⁹ <https://www.nytimes.com/1976/08/29/archives/the-harlem-renaissance-the-guest-word.html> (par. 1)

¹⁰ <https://www.nytimes.com/1976/08/29/archives/the-harlem-renaissance-the-guest-word.htm> (par. 3)

to construct model molecules; Oliver is a basketball player with a passion for piracy and poetry; Hyacinth is a shy little artisan who makes handmade products, from buttons with funny phrases for custom-made outfits, and embarks on her quest for courage; finally, Laney is a rabbit trainer who dresses up as a panda and loves practicing forward rolls. They love living on 141st street where they know everyone “by name, age and hairstyle” (Glaser 2017: 9). All of a sudden, eleven days before Christmas, Mama and Papa give them some terrible news: their landlord, Mr. Beiderman, does not want to renew their lease and they have to move as soon as possible. Thus, they hurriedly develop a plan of attack – Operation Beiderman – to win the man over and convince him to let them stay: they decide to do nice things to him, working on their Acts of Kindness project. Yet, the challenge is not easy as the old man never leaves his apartment and is extremely quick-tempered. The plot follows them in all their attempts – from buying him breakfast to organising a petition – engaging the readers through the dynamism of the plot, the development of the characters, the mystery which veils the figure of Mr. Beiderman and the suspense about the eagerly awaited happy ending.

“A Warmhearted, Multiracial Update to the Classic Big-Family Novel”: this is the title of a review of the book, published on the official site of The New York Times on October 2017¹¹. It highlights two of the main elements of the book, family and community, which I will examine in the following paragraphs as they are linked to some of the reasons why I have chosen this novel for my dissertation: it is extremely “up to date” with today’s societies and it could also be proposed to Italian young readers. Moreover, the adjective “warmhearted” evokes the way in which readers are welcomed into the private environment shared by the members of the family, a place where a little community is constructed, full of intimacy and where the interweaving of the lives of its members is shown without filters, contributing to the “authenticity” of the plot.

“I do think that families are the most beautiful things in all the world!” burst out Jo, who was in an unusually up-lifted frame of mind. (Alcott 2018: 458)

Family is a social construction cherished by children’s literature, which has been crowded with family stories since its flourishing in the 18th century, as family has been used to promote a specific ideology such as that of the patriarchal family which has

¹¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/27/books/review/karina-yan-glaser-vanderbeekers-of-141st-street.html>

attempted “to instil in its readers certain values which dictate how families should be: loving, respectful, preferably with two parents, contained in domestic harmony and sharing wholesome homecooked family meals” (Alston 2008: 2). As a consequence, every family which did not meet these criteria tended to be marginalised, labelled as “other”, if not even demonised (Aston 2008: 9). However, since the 1960s the “traditional” nuclear family has collapsed due to economic, cultural and social changes, including divorce laws and greater sexual freedom followed by the availability of the contraceptive pill (Alston 2008. 23). Although the ideal nuclear family is an image which is still cherished, as it may be considered as intrinsic to human’s survival instincts (Alston 2008: 8), “a gradual cultural acceptance of the fluidity of the family from the 1960s onwards” (Alston 2008: 24) has occurred and books destined for children started to include single-parent families, homosexual families as well as to discuss more complex domestic issues such as divorce, death or abuse.

At the beginning of *The Vanderbeekers of 141st street*, divorce is actually mentioned when Mama and Papa are looking for the right words to inform their children about Mr. Beiderman’s ultimatum and Oliver interrupts them guessing that they are about to divorce. While Laney, who is four and three quarters years old, is the only one who does not know what the word means, the other children do know and they react in different ways: Oliver seems to be interested in the possible advantages of the situation – his friend Jimmy L got a pet snake after their parents’ divorce – Isa is concerned about splitting her time between them, while Jessie is terrified by the thought of her mum and dad not loving each other anymore (Glaser 2017: 2). Interestingly, divorce is presented as something that might occur in a family and the mentioning of the different reactions might show the intent of the author to invite readers to reflect on this issue and, possibly, on the way in which they would react, given the same situation.

“Specific roles within the family have, as we have seen, become more blurred in recent years, and while we still depend ideologically on the myth of family, we have also begun to recognise its diversity” (Alston 2008: 25). In *The Vanderbeekers* novel, the element of “diversity” is linked to the fact that the family is referred to as “biracial”. What might be interesting to notice is that the author just gives the readers some veiled hints as to the possible cultural and ethnic backgrounds of the parents. This is because the readers should only focus their attention on the way in which the children look at this diversity,

as something unique, valuable and to be proud of: “the kids exhibited an eclectic mix of physical characteristics and loved comparing which traits they got from what parent” (Glaser 2017: 19).

Family is a central element for the development of the relational and emotional competences of every child (Vianello 2019: 254) who “learns from his/her parental role models, and competes against and works with siblings, he/she learns to co-exist with others” (Alston 2008: 8). In the Vanderbecker family the values shared by each member are the following: respect for everyone, animals included – despite how “different” he/she may be perceived according to society – friendship, sense of community, helping one another in an inevitable interconnection between different individualities. According to Vianello (2019: 236), empathy starts to be felt by children when they are two years old and gradually takes more and more complex forms thanks to all the new experiences they face every day. It consists of cognitive and affective processes which allow children to develop an ability to put themselves in the shoes of another individual and to share his/her emotional state (Vianello 2019: 235). When the Vanderbecker children discover that Mr. Beiderman has lost his wife and daughter in a car accident, they demonstrate a feeling of deep empathy for the man, which is likely to be perceived, and even shared, by readers.

“Isn’t that so sad?” Isa asked. “Can you imagine if we all died and only Papa was left? What would Papa do?” “Papa would cry,” Laney said. “He would cry, and cry, and cry.” The kids fell silent, imagining what it would be like to have your family die and be the only one left living. (Glaser 2017: 201)

(Isa) “Now I feel terrible going up there and playing the same violin his daughter did, right in his face. Like I was throwing all these bad memories at him.” (Glaser 2017: 256)

(Jessie) “it’s probably best we’re leaving so he can have some peace. I spent so much time avoiding him, and now all I want to do is to make him feel better.” “Me too,” Isa said. “Me too,” echoed Oliver. (Glaser 2017: 257)

Family is intertwined with another element which regularly recurs in children’s literature: home, the place where the characters live, where they can find their loved ones and where it is nice to turn back to. It is not a coincidence that both the epigraphs, which open *The Vanderbeekers* revolve around the word “home”: the one taken from *Anne of Green Gables*, for instance, says: “Home and I are such good friends”. As well as family, home is surrounded by a powerful ideology and books often tell readers how a “good” home should be, even if in contemporary capitalist society, it has lost its being a site of surveillance due to a loss of parental authority (Alston 2008: 11). Alston (2008: 73)

proposes four main features which homes embody in literature for children: they might be a heaven, a not-so-perfect reality, a womb-like entity and the place where Mother lives. Without plunging too deep into the analysis of each type, in the following paragraphs I will focus on the first two images, as they are the most relevant for the present analysis.

Home is a heaven when it is “cosy, safe and warm” (Alston 2008: 83) and it can be associated with good and moral domesticity. Therefore, it is often represented as the only place where people can find solace and refuge and, not by coincidence, happy endings do often consist of an “ever-clichéd homecoming” (Alston 2008: 73) which promotes “the opposition between inside and outside and associates home with warmth and belonging and the outside with the cold sense of isolation” (Alston 2008: 74). After finding the courage to face Mr. Beiderman and miserably failing, Hyacinth runs back home and takes refuge in her bed. In this scene the Vanderbecker home is actually shown as a place which can embrace each of its members when he/she feels a little fragile. However, it is never referred to as a place which can “hide” the children from the outside world: they spend time both inside and outside their home, experiencing pleasant and difficult situations in both the environments. For instance, they say they feel safe when they climb the fire escape to reach the rooftop – the Roof of Epic Proportions – which they like precisely because it makes them feel connected to the city.

The Vanderbeekers gathered at the south side of the brownstone, leaning their elbows along the ledge [...], the south view was the best. From there they could see the rows of buildings up and down the block. (Glaser 2017: 56)

Home has often been depicted as a not-so-perfect reality when it is “stifling”, from a literal and metaphorical point of view: when it is threatened by poverty or it is not a place of love, benevolence and warmth. “Good families, it seems, rarely live in ‘bad’ homes and while these exist in children’s literature, the ideal and hope to return to a good home remains a constant didactic subtext” (Glaser 2017: 76). The Vanderbeekers’ home has rumbling pipes, creaking stairs, whistling radiators, a tiny walk-in-closet-turned-bedroom – where Oliver sleeps – and its backyard is rather “skinny” (Glaser 2017: 3). However, its inhabitants would never leave it, even though moving a bit away from the city might mean having a bigger and more appealing house. This is because they like both the perfect and “not-so-perfect” moments they live in it, being aware of the fact that a “home” is not just a place with four bedrooms and “a living room that flow(s) into an open kitchen”

(Glaser 2017: 3) but an “atmosphere” created by a group of people. ““We didn’t win over the Beiderman,’ Isa said, ‘but this made me realise that home is much more than a place. [...] It’s good to be a Vanderbeeker, wherever we live”” (Glaser 2017: 252). This atmosphere may be breathed also when leaving their apartment to enter that of Miss Rosie and Mr. Jeet, Angie, and, even, the Beiderman.

“Family” is a very fluid term and questions such as “What is a family?”, “Who are the real members of the family?” are not easy to answer. Up to the 17th century, for instance, even the servants would be considered members of the family (Alston 2008: 14). As regards the nuclear family, a myth sanctified since the 19th century, it seems to have been gradually recognized as a vaster “entity”, which may include step-siblings and step-parents – the so-called “blended family” (Alston 2008: 25) – or all the people who someone loves and respects and who are part of his/her life, despite being more or less physically distant. As concerns the Vanderbeekers, for example, their family would not be the same without their three pets: “a dog named Franz, a cat name George Washington, and a house rabbit named Paganini” (Glaser 2017: 1), who are playmates, friends and even faithful helpers. Well-known classics for children have offered different interpretations of families and “even when there is no family, a surrogate family is created” (Alston 2008: 2). By way of illustration, one of the most touching definitions of “extended” family is given by Luis Sepulveda in *The History of a Seagull and the Cat who Taught Her to Fly*:

(Zorba) “We all love you, Lucky. And we love you because you *are* a seagull [...] We’ve protected you from the moment you pecked your way out of your shell. We’ve given you all our affection without even thinking of making a cat out of you. We love you as a gull. We feel that you love us too, that we’re your friends, your family, and we want you to know that with you we’ve learnt something that makes us very proud: we’ve learnt to appreciate and respect and love someone who’s different from us.” (Sepulveda 2016: 90)

The quotations at the beginning of the present chapter belong to two of the most famous novels written by Roald Dahl, *Matilda* and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, whose happy endings are tightly linked to the concept of “family”. Despite the lack of a biological relationship, Matilda decides to live with her teacher Miss Honey as she considers the moments she spends with her teacher as more intimate and authentic as those spent with her parents, while Willy Wonka not only finds in Charlie the perfect heir for his factory but he finally meets a loving family ready to welcome him. A similar thing

happens to the “enemy” of the Vanderbeekers, Mr. Beiderman: after losing his “biological” family – his wife and daughter – in a car accident, he withdraws from others hiding his suffering behind an unbearably hostile attitude. Yet, he discovers an alternative and unexpected family in the Vanderbeekers and the other members of the local community. Thus, he opens up his heart again and lets himself care for other people.

Mr. Biederman quietly surveyed the scene, and then he took a deep breath. Oliver, who had glanced over at just that moment, said later that it looked like Mr. Beiderman was breathing happiness into his body. (Glaser 2018: 287)

The image of the “extended family” may be linked to another image which is still central both in children’s literature and in today’s societies: community. At the end of *The Vanderbeekers*, Papa gives an interesting definition of this term when he proposes a special toast to his guests on Christmas Eve:

(Papa) “I have always believed that raising kids [...] means surrounding your kids with amazing people who can bring science experiments and jam cookies, laughter and joy, and beautiful experiences into their lives. From every part of my being, I want to thank you for giving me and my family the gifts of friendship and love.” (Glaser 2017: 251)

The sense of “community” as a place where many people live and can be considered as part of a specific group¹², immediately arises when looking at the cover of the book, where the Vanderbeekers’ brownstone is represented as encircled by other buildings. This subtle reference to urban life is strengthened by another passage which mentions “a narrow piece of abandoned land, which Miss Josie always talked about making into a community garden” (Glaser 2017: 17) which, by definition, is a piece of land shared by the members of the residents to grow their produce and with even larger goals such as “education, community supported agriculture entrepreneurship or food bank gardening¹³”. This passage may metaphorically refer to what being part of a community might mean: not feeling “abandoned” but a part of a greater whole, which is likely to help you to see, unlock and fulfil your potentials.

The Vanderbeekers began to trudge back to 141st Street, all illusions about the magic of the castle college lost forever. They yearned for the warmth of their home the pets awaiting their arrival, the comfort of Mama’s nourishing meals, and the love of their friends and neighbors. (Glaser 2017: 188)

¹² <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/community?q=community>

¹³ https://depts.washington.edu/open2100/pdf/2_OpenSpaceTypes/Open_Space_Types/cgarden_typology.pdf

According to Canevaro (2015: 26), people unconsciously develop a sense of belongingness, that is to say a need to be an essential part of something¹⁴ which makes them feel safe and integrated. Although sometimes this need for belonging may result in dangerous attitudes such as the identification of enemies only on the basis of negative stereotypes (Canevaro 2015: 26), it is also very important to be developed and guided, especially in globalized Western societies which are more and more “liquid”, according to the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (Maceratini 2019: 3). The symptoms of this “liquidity” are the volatilization of social relations and a new distribution of roles and functions, especially in the urban environment, which result in new forms of exclusion and inequality (Maceratini 2019: 3). Moreover, those defined by the specialist as “civil public spaces” – “characterized by spontaneous relationships and genuine freedom of expression” (Maceratini 2019: 4) – are losing their “civic” value to become mere “public” spaces.

Glaser’s warmhearted story highlights a cold truth: What is often missing in the busy lives of today’s plugged-in, checked-out families is a sense of community. In the vast village of New York City, she suggests, what it takes to raise a child can still be found on one square block.¹⁵

The local community of the Vanderbeekers is presented as a colourful festival of “bio”- diversity – “uno scenario di tante diversità” (Canevaro 2015: 5) – where different individuals meet with other individuals, where different “senses” share a “common sense”, which is necessary for social co-existence as “community can only occur among people who respect each other’s subjectivity” (Seelinger Trites 1997: 8). In this regard, it may be interesting to notice that Chapter Two does not only include the description of the family’s brownstone but also those of the nearby buildings with special attention to their peculiarities.

(Mama) “I always thought the kids would spend their entire childhoods here. You know, having the same type of childhood you had. Being supported by the neighborhood. Knowing everyone by name.” (Glaser 2017: 133)

Caring for others is another fundamental feature of “authentic” communities and it involves both to “cure” and to “care” for others: to feeling an “impulse” to worry for others, to pay attention to them and to protect them if necessary (Di Sivo 2007: 27). This

¹⁴ <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/belongingness>

¹⁵ <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/27/books/review/karina-yan-glaser-vanderbeekers-of-141st-street.html>

is what the five little Vanderbeekers try to do with Mr. Beiderman, “taking care of him”, to help him see how much better it would be to let them stay. They come up with ideas which they are likely to have learnt from their parents but also from living in a community where people seem to be ready to help one another. Miss Josie, for example, offers Isa cookies, tea and one of her precious handkerchiefs to stop her crying when the cantankerous Mr. Beiderman yells at the girl while she is performing *Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star* (Glaser 2015: 10). For her part, Miss Josie – as well as her husband, Mr. Jeet – is helped by Mama and Papa with grocery shopping, doctors’ appointments and medicines (Glaser 2017: 41). Mama and Papa are important models for their children as they are both very active in their community: Papa is the superintendent of the building and makes small repairs and takes out the trash without being paid, while Mama loves to make cookies for the neighbors, both people and animals.

“Your mama sure does have a hand with the baking,” Mr. Jones said with an agreeable nod. “I don’t know what the neighborhood dogs would do without you, Miss Hyacinth.” (Glaser 2017: 32)

Before delving into the analysis of the relations between some of the characters of the novel and gender issues, I will conclude this first part of the chapter with a quotation from Canevaro (2015: 77): “ci vuole un intero villaggio a far crescere un bambino”.

2.1 Gender issues

But every once in a while, there's a day when I don't have to be a princess. No lessons, no expectations. A day where anything can happen. A day I can change my fate. (Chapman, B., Andrews, M., dir. *Brave* 2012)

“I’m doing it my way,” Laney said, pushing Jessie’s hand away. (Glaser 2017: 194)

“Never take advice; can’t keep still all day, and not being a pussycat, I don’t like to doze by the fire. I like adventures, and I’m going to find some.” (Jo March in Alcott 2018: 46)

“Gender roles are not innate or biologically determined” (Seelinger Trites 1997: 81) but performed by people according to the expectations and customs of society. According to

Seelinger Trites the patriarchal ideology has been constricting both girls and boys into traditional gender roles as it considers human beings as divided into two main groups, males against females, where every exception cannot escape demonisation. Females have been expected to limit their personal and professional ambitions in order to value only their beauty and grace manners (Salvi 2011: 70), while males have been sharply limited in the expression of their emotional state. As a consequence, even boys and girls have been put under the pressure of societal “great” expectations: girls have been required to look for pink dresses, to be interested in cooking and household duties and to behave “tenderly” to join a troop of perfect Cinderellas, waiting for a prince to become splendid princesses. Boys, instead, have been expected to escape everything is gaudy and glittering, to reject colours such as pink and purple and to hide every emotional manifestation which might make them seem “fragile” (Gancitano, Colamedici 2019: 207).

Purtroppo l'identità maschile prevede la totale espulsione del femminile da sé, con una perdita drammatica di “virtù sociali” che dovrebbero essere semplicemente umane: l'attenzione e la sensibilità verso il prossimo, l'empatia e la capacità di identificarsi nell'altro, saper ascoltare, consolare, accudire, curare. (Lipperini 2007: 13)

According to Salvi (2011: 31), gender issues are not to be ignored when writing for children as books can actually reinforce or challenge these stereotypes and writers have the responsibility to use literature as “a weapon” (Seelinger Trites 1997: 23) to offer visible alternative models. “The important thing is that girls – and boys – have choices and that they know that they have choices” (Seelinger Trites 1997: 2), while children’s books have often been used as means to teach girls and boys *how* to be girls and boys (Nodelman 2008 in Bottalla 2009: 173).

Choice is the keyword which bonds two apparently different worlds: feminism and children’s literature, which have historically suffered a similar marginalization, categorization and disempowerment. The basic premise of feminism has been that all people should be treated equally – regardless of gender, race, class, or religion – and should have the right to a journey to self-discovery. Children’s literature has been gender-linked since its flourishing in the 19th century, when books were marketed for a specific group of readers (boys or girls) promoting the birth or replication of gender labels. For instance, in 1744 John Newbery, who established the first press devoted publishing books for young readers, released “A Little Pretty Pocket Book, intended for the Instruction and

Amusement of little Master Tommy and Pretty Miss Polly [...] will infallibly make Tommy a good Boy and Polly a good Girl” (Bottalla 2009: 4). The book was “marketed with a ball for boys and a pincushion for girls, as if somehow children of different sexes would read the book differently” (Townsend 1965 cited in Seelinger Trites 1997: 3). By contrast, feminist children’s novels present characters who are empowered regardless of gender and whose development is not hindered by their sex (Seelinger Trites 1997: 4).

Little boys and girls are made of gendering that they absorb from the culture – and they absorb it directly from literature, and that literature has absorbed it from the general culture. Literature is part of what makes us, genders us. (Hunt in Bottalla 2009: 14)

As stated above, children’s literature has been used as a means to spread the patriarchal ideology: as well as “family”, discussed in the previous section, femininity has represented another social and cultural institution which had to satisfy specific and strict criteria, to be sanctified or demonised by society. It might be sufficient to think about Victorian society where a “good woman was an angel, submerging herself in family, existing only as daughter, wife and mother” (Auerbach 1982: 4). Women had to be “angels in the house”, to silence themselves, to become speechless and be socially acceptable through a good, plain and sensible behaviour (Seelinger Trites 1997: 48); otherwise labels such as “fallen woman” or “old maid” (Auerbach 1982: 4) were attached to them. As stated by Lerer (2008: 229), women have been continually put on stages where they have to perform flat and passive characters, often stuck in domestic “adventures”.

Fairy-tale girls are often in the forest, and they differ from the boys. Boys are explorers, woodcutter, path-makers, or controllers. Girls remain lost or threatened. One great exception, of course is Gretel, who masterminds her and her brother’s salvation. (Lerer 2008: 231)

In children’s literature, books such as *The Little Female Academy* (1749) by Sarah Fielding were expected to teach girls how to be socially acceptable; yet, characters such as Jo March, Mary Lennox and Anne Sherley started to challenge the passivity attributed to girls and raise their voices against self-abnegation, obedience and submission. The revolutionary soul of Jo, for instance, is vividly portrayed in the words of Patti Smith (cited in Alcott 2018: vii): “the lanky headstrong girl, who raced on foot, ripped her skirts climbing trees, spoke in common slang, and denounced social pretensions”. Girls and women started to be represented, both in society and in literature, as less static and

powerless, and in the 1960s, feminism and children's literature experienced a similar flourishing and renovating period, inextricably interweaving their paths. Children and women stopped being made voiceless and invisible creatures because considered helpless and independent (Lissa 1987 cited in Seelinger Trites 1997: 48), while an increasing number of books for children started to show feminist features, contributing to the fight for female empowerment. These literary products reject stereotypical gender roles rewriting heroes' quests with female protagonists who subvert the tendency to become Sleeping Beauties. "Growing up" no more means docility and passivity (Seelinger Trites 1997: 4), moving from an active to a passive role which was necessary in societies like that of Jo March, who is often reprimanded for her running, which is an excessively "romping" way to behave (Alcott 2018: 146) if she wants to be a "proper" lady, and who "tried desperately to be good, but her bosom enemy was always ready to flame up and defeat her; and it took years of patient effort to subdue it." (Alcott 2018: 73).

Buffo, dopo lustri di discussioni attorno alla fluidità dei generi, alla prevalenza dell'ibrido, al ritorno del mito dell'androgino, trovarsi di nuovo davanti a iperfemmine e supermaschi: apparentemente e allegramente consapevoli di un ruolo a cui sembrano voler aderire in permanenza, senza il desiderio di giocarci e di sperimentare come, per un lungo momento, sembrava possibile fare. (Lipperini 2007: 30)

However, since the second half of the 1990s a phenomenon of "re-genderization" has occurred and gender stereotypes have found a new source of energy in updated forms of entertainment: television series, films, games or videogames, animation and books (Lipperini 2007: 18). Today, the children's literary market is often guided by consumerist values and continues to offer the same stereotypes as decades ago although through new forms: for example, new editions of classic fairy tales have often pink, glittered and richly decorated covers and illustrations, if they are addressed to female readers. Moreover, they still "invite" these group of consumers to resemble specific figures, who are apparently different from those of the past but similarly restraining, such as princesses, witches, fairies or showgirls, who seem to instil in girls the idea that they need to be seductive to be seen and to build their own identity (Salvi 2011: 71). Lipperini (2007: 11) claims that blogs, forums, chats, sites, videogames and virtual characters make girls focus exclusively on their physical aspect which aims at arising boys' interest, strengthening the psychological and affective dependency on them.

Feminist power is more about being aware of one's agency than it is about controlling other people. Marilyn French (1985) describes feminist power as having 'power to' do what one wants rather than having 'power over' other people. (Seelinger Trites 1997: 8).

The Vanderbecker of 141st street is not directly defined as a feminist novel; however, the main characters of the story might be linked to some of the issues which are central to feminist revindications. The alternative interpretation of "power" mentioned above is at the basis of the success of Operation Beiderman: the Vanderbecker children show a respect for their enemy, Mr. Beiderman, and do not chose to win him over through tricks or mischievous behaviours, which might reveal or play on his weaknesses. They show the old man who they really are, how much they are worth and why he should make them stay in the building. Through the development of the Operation, they discover who they really are, their value and why they are so special for their family and community. Hyacinth, Jessie and Isa, three of the Vanderbecker children, might be considered as the "real" heroines of the story, the actual "doers", as they are the ones who are so involved in this specific moment of their lives that they find the courage to challenge their own identities and grow intellectually and emotionally, while trying to save their home. They follow a path toward self-discovery, experiencing situations which make them deal with three essential concepts cherished by feminist discourse: autonomy, self-expression and self-awareness. In the following paragraphs I will focus on the three girls, who might also be considered "feminist empowered" protagonists – "they are able to do what they want to do, what they need to do" (Seelinger Trites 1997: 8) – and are related with two keywords which have been central to feminism over the decades: awakening and sisterhood. In order to make the analysis more detailed, I will also refer to Beth, Jo and Meg March, three of the main protagonists of the well-known American novel *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott, which "remains not only a beloved book, but also a deeply relevant one" (Rioux in Alcott 2018: xxi). It is still an important text both for feminism and children's literature as it shows how femininity was constructed in an earlier era and as it is a "girls's book", which has actually addressed everyone and it has been read by everyone (Rioux in Alcott 2018: xx). Moreover, the "lively, combative, and caring atmosphere of the March family parlour" (Smith in Alcott 2018: vii) vividly reminds me one of that of the Vanderbecker family.

Her awakening is not bestowed on her by a male awakener; instead, she wakes herself and discovers herself to be a strong, independent, and articulate person. (Seelinger Trites 1997: 8)

Hyacinth is six-year old, who loves animals and making handmade presents for her family and friends. She has a kind heart and she is a careful observer, who sometimes manages to notice details which are ignored by the other children.

“Will we move closed by? So Franz can keep all his doggie friends?” asked Hyacinth. At Hyacinth’s comment, the other kids’ eyes widened. They’d never considered that they might to leave the neighborhood where they knew everyone on the block by name, age, and hairstyle. “I’ve lived in the neighborhood my whole life,” Papa said. “My job is here.” Only Hyacinth noticed that he didn’t answer her question or look anyone in the eye as he said that. (Glaser 2017: 8)

Although her siblings consider her to be a brave person and give considerable importance to her opinions as concerns Operation Beiderman, she always feels “not enough” and she blames herself for being “the fourth Vanderbecker, first-class worrier and the shyest kid on 141st Street” (Glaser 2017: 90). She lacks self-confidence and suffers from middle child syndrome, which means that she has developed an identity crisis and does not consider herself as special as the first-born or the last-born siblings¹⁶. Excluding Oliver, who is the only boy, Hyacinth perceives herself in “the true middle spot, fending for herself in a household of loud, strong-willed, attention-grabbing siblings” (Glaser 2017:65): her sisters are always more courageous and confident than her. She has developed the habit of waking up earlier than the other children so as to have some time to spend with her parents; thus, she seems to feel as if she were transparent to the other members of the family. Yet, she hides a strong determination because, despite her low self-esteem, she wants to change, to find a way to be braver and she is actually so strong-minded that she never desists from her quest although she experiences some failures and times of lingering uncertainty. She manages to find her courage and determinacy thanks to little adventures she embarks on by herself and, from a feminist point of view, what is interesting to notice is that she is not awakened by someone but she awakens herself.

It was time for Hyacinth to be more than just the fourth Vanderbecker, the shy one, the scared one. She needed to be Hyacinth the Brave: a Girl on a Mission to Save Her Home. Together Hyacinth the Brave and Franz left their apartment and marched upstairs. [...]

¹⁶ <https://www.ecronicon.com/ecpp/pdf/ECPP-08-00562.pdf>

“Be brave, be brave, be brave,” Hyacinth whispered to herself. [...] Hyacinth squared her shoulders and knocked on the door. (Glaser 2017: 89)

At the beginning of the novel she asks her father how she can be braver: Papa answers that to him she is one of the bravest people in the world but he does not “construct” her personality, forcing her into strict features, and offers her a new interpretation of courage which she has to investigate by herself. Quoting a French writer, Anatole France, he tells her that “until one has loved an animal, a part of one’s souls remains unawakened” (Glaser 2017: 67). He refers to the fact that she is a super-brave person as she is very generous, even to animals, and “not so many people are brave enough to be so loving” (Glaser 2017: 67). Thus, he invites her to look for a different kind of courage which is not measured by strength of muscles – or arms – but strength of heart. And this “new”, if not “authentic”, courage leads Hyacinth to win her terrible fear of Mr. Beiderman and take his “hand and (pull) him up. ‘Come on, it’s time for Christmas breakfast’” (Glaser 2017: 279).

It might be interesting to notice that while at the beginning of the novel she seems to fit the description of Beth March – “the docile animal-lover” (Rioux in Alcott 2018: xix), “shy and quiet, sitting in corners still needed [...] leaving silence and shadow behind” (Alcott 2018: 40) – by the end of the novel she seems to resemble more Jo’s nature: combative, headstrong and independent. Moreover, she also shares with Jo some of the traits which are considered characteristic of feminist protagonists: she has a place in her community but she is not excessively community-oriented; she cares about other people but she also cares about herself; and she is well aware of the importance of concepts such as self-discovery and choice. This because she has grown “more aware of her own agency, more aware of her ability to assert her own personality and to enact her own decisions at the end of the novel as she has been at the beginning” (Seelinger Trites 1997: 6).

Hyacinth’s first thought was that he didn’t look half as werewolfish as he had when she’d dropped off the placemat. Her second thought was *I feel brave*. [...] Hyacinth stood up straight, channelling Hyacinth the Brave, and step inside with Franz at her heels. (Glaser 2017: 276)

Isa and Jessie are twelve-years-old twins, they are extremely supportive of one another and share a very peculiar connection which sometimes makes them seem to be linked by a bond which is not just emotional but also spiritual.

“I never asked you how you felt after playing at that concert,” Jessie said. “It was amazing. This is going to sound crazy, but I felt your strength flow through me when I was playing. See, Jessie, you make me strong. Sometimes I think you know every thought that goes through my head.” (Glaser 2017: 162)

“C’mon, Jess,” Isa said. “We might be moving soon. I want to share this with you.” Silence. “Please, Jess? Don’t you love me?” she wheedled. Jessie sighted and stood up. “Fine. But only because you identified my greatest weakness.” (Glaser 2017: 157)

Although they are actual sisters, their relationship clearly shows that women and girls need to share things, first between one another. They need sisters – whether or not biological – to discuss problems and changes without competition but united by a strong trustfulness. This “extended” sisterhood, the supportive presence of women embarking on the same quest, might actually be the basic premise to discover themselves (Gancitano, Colamedici 2019: 188). Moreover, this solidarity among women seems to be peculiarly necessary in present society, which tends to value individualism based on a ruthless competition (Lipperini 2007: 16). As concerns Isa and Jessie, their “special” relationship makes them face differences and peculiarities which first seem to threaten their bond but which eventually help them discover the beauty and richness of their unique individualities. Despite the physical resemblance, they are extremely different: Isa usually has her hair in a perfect ponytail while Jessie has always dishevelled hair; Isa is a passionate violinist while Jessie would like to be a scientist; Isa would like to go to an eighth-grade party while Jessie is “appalled by the idea of going to a fancy-pants dance” (Glaser 2018: 104). When Benny, a friend of the twins who is secretly in love with Isa, asks Jessie if her sister would want to go to prom with him, Jessie tells him that this would never happen because they think and do the same things. Yet, when she looks at Isa’s excited and dreamy expression while trying on an elegant dress with their friend Allegra, she starts to feel extremely confused.

Did Isa *want* to go to the dance? Generally the twins were in agreement about these types of things. But there Isa was, standing before her, looking so elegant and grown up in the peach gown [...] What had happened? [...] If Isa went to this dance without her – and with a *boy* – what would that mean? It would be the first major life event they didn’t experience together. (Glaser 2017: 103)

Their diverging opinions lead them to move away from one another and experience a very challenging moment which makes them feel reckless and alone. Jessie is afraid of losing her sister and feels betrayed because Isa’s behavior seems to “grow” in a different direction and to violate the Rule of the Twins: “somewhere in that unwritten contract,

there must be a clause that clearly stated that neither was to attend a dance without the other, especially in a *date*” (Glaser 2017: 78). For her part, Isa feels betrayed by Jessie when she discovers what her sister has told Benny: she accused her of having ruined her relationship with the boy and asks her to be left alone.

“Do you have the right to make decisions for me? You *knew* I wanted to go to the dance. Now Benny thinks I hate him. Why would you do this to me?” “Isa, I though you wouldn’t want to go! Remember how I used to make fun of those dances –” “*I am not you!*” Isa yelled. “We are not the same person! [...] I want you to leave me alone. Don’t speak to me. Don’t speak for me, don’t make decisions for me. Don’t talk to other people about me. *Got it?*” (Glaser 2017: 212)

Jessie and Isa both feel betrayed and “break up” because they discover this difference between them for the first time. First this scares them, but eventually it makes them realize that difference is necessary in order to unite them more than even. In *Little Women* Jo and Meg March experience a very similar situation especially when Meg visits the Moffatts and goes to “vanity fair” and when she seems determined to accept the marriage proposal of Mr. Brooke. Jo feels betrayed by her sister, who seems to have grown up so quickly, leaving her behind and ruining their idyllic sisterly relationship forever. She does not understand how Meg’s ambitions may be so different from hers and tries to convince her sister to follow her passion for acting.

“I just wish I could marry Meg myself, and keep her safe in the family. [...] there’s an end of peace and fun, and cosy times, together. I see it all! [...] Meg will be absorbed, and no good to me any more; Brooke will scratch up a fortune somehow, - carry her off and make a hole in the family; and I shall break my heart, and everything will be abominably uncomfortable. (Alcott 2018: 193)

For her part, Meg feels betrayed by Jo as she is not understood by her sister and she is even afraid of being honest with her about her feelings and actions. “How absurd of you! The girls dressed me up for fun, and I rather like it. Wouldn’t Jo stare if she saw me?” said Meg” (Alcott 2018: 90).

What these two pairs of sisters share is the need to re-“articulate” their “self” and to do so “(they) must be able to recognize not only who (they are) but how (they are) different from those around (them), (their) sense of self is dependent on (their) understanding of how (their) subjectivity is unique” (Seelinger Trites 1997: 49). However, although they lose control of what is around them, they gain control of what is inside them. At the end of the story, they discover the unexpected bond between

“difference” and “connection” (Seelinger Trites 1997: 82): “difference” does not necessarily mean “otherness”, but it seems to hide a desire to connect a subject with other different individualities. Thus, they discover the importance of interdependency, which refers to the interrelationships which are essential in everyone’s life, and which is greatly encouraged in feminist children’s literature (Seelinger Trites 1997: 82) as it involves a mutual dependency between two or more subjects which does not limit them but actually emphasizes their equality.

CHAPTER 3 The Vanderbeeker family: the translating process

The process of translation between two different written languages involves the changing of an original written text (the source text or ST) in the original verbal language (the source language or SL) into a written text (the target text or TT) in a different verbal language (the target language or TL). (Munday 2016: 8)

Translation is a process by which the chain of signifiers that constitutes the source-language text is replaced by a chain of signifiers in the target language which the translator provides on the strength of an interpretation. (Venuti 2008: 17)

These definitions summarize the way in which the translation process is too often envisaged: an issue of form and content. However, a translation, especially when addressed to children, is much more than that. Translation is an act of communication which involves several participants: the sender, the translator and the (assumed) reader (Venuti 2008 :19). The form and meaning of a message may need to be “accommodated” in agreement with the target literary and social system. Therefore, translation is an act of negotiation, between different cultural and linguistic contexts, which can build bridges between distant cultures, overcoming national and international boundaries (Bamberger 1978, in Tabbert 2002: 311). As communication is at the basis of every social interaction between human beings, translation can also be defined as an act of humanity. Translation is an issue of power:

It is always communication limited by its address to a specific reading audience. The violent effects of translation are felt at home as well as abroad. On the other hand, translation wields enormous power in the construction of national identities for foreign culture. (Venuti 2008: 19)

Translators may have the power to decide how to render the form and content of the source text according to their own interpretations of the stylistic and thematic qualities of children’s literature as well as the readers’ needs. Yet these choices are more often limited by the systemic constraints imposed by editors and reviewers, who have the ultimate power to decide whether or not to publish the translated text. Finally, children, the target readers, may be also considered to be a powerful presence in the translation process, being the “actual” consumers, if not beneficiaries, whose needs must be satisfied. However, they do not seem to play so crucial a role, and the needs to be fulfilled are more often

those of the adults who gravitate around them as parents, librarians, teachers and educators.

One of the most powerful constraints is the special status and often ambiguous status of the addressee in a children's books, since it must appeal to the child reader and the adults, who is regarded in culture both as superior to the child and as responsible for deciding what is appropriate reading material for the child. (Lathey 2016 :93)

Lathey even refers to the paradoxical status of children as readers, as adults are those who write, publish, edit books for them and determine the difference between canonized and non-canonized children's literature.

Translation is an issue of responsibility, especially on the part of translators, who are asked to be able to defend and justify the strategies and procedures they adopt in the translation process. The quality of their work is often judged according to the degree of loyalty they show towards the author of the source text: loyalty has long been measured as a faithful representation of both the original form and content, even if meaning is becoming more and more relevant in this regard. However, translators need to show respect not only to the original author of a text or to all the adults involved in children's literature mentioned above, but also to the main readers of their texts, children. Being a child means being "dynamic, imaginative, experimental, interactive and unstable" (Peter Hollindale in Lathey 2016: 8); therefore, texts destined for children should be characterised by all these features. Translation is also an act of respect: translators should not undermine their own work or the cognitive capacities of their receivers, struggling to offer them texts as lexically and semantically rich as the source ones or those destined for adults. They need to appeal to their creativity and their whole linguistic repertoire, extending it if necessary, in the attempt to avoid cases of abridgements, which could merely hide a disrespectful distrust of children's appreciation of ingenious and creative solutions, affecting the integrity of the text. In order to illustrate this point, I will provide some examples taken from the chapters I translated from *The Vanderbeekers of 141st street*. Looking for creative alternatives can often help to change point of view and unravel the embroidery of passages such as the following ones.

ST-EN	TT-IT
Can't you tell I'm in the <u>anger stage of grief</u> ?	Non vedi che devo ancora <u>elaborare il lutto</u> ?
One brownstone was rotund – like a <u>jolly, well-fed grand-father</u>	Uno era bello rotondo, come un <u>simpatico nonnino buongustaio</u>
Mr. Jones wore a few accessories not sanctioned by the USPS. These were round buttons assigned by Hyacinth with help from <u>her button machine</u> .	Indossava anche qualche accessorio permesso dalla USPS, come le spille che Viola aveva creato per lui con la sua <u>spillatrice professionale</u> .

In the first example, one psychological stage is replaced by another, in order to keep the irony and provide readers with an element which may be easier to recognize. In the second example, the adjective “buongustaio” is as jolly as the imagined grand-father. Lastly, even the case of “spillatrice professionista” may also be considered a solution which requires a creative thinking: Hyacinth likes to make buttons, which correspond to the Italian “spille”, and she has a “button machine” which cannot be rendered as “spillatrice”, corresponding to what is called “stapler” in English. Not finding a suitable Italian correspondent I decided to add the adjective “professionale” to “spillatrice” in order to make the readers think about something which works exclusively to make “spille”.

O’Sullivan highlights a number of traits which are characteristic of children’s literature (Tabbert 2002: 316). In the following paragraphs I will discuss the interplay of pictures and words and the playful use of language, leaving to the next chapter an in-depth analysis of cultural references. Illustrations are an essential part of the dialogic interaction at the basis of every book: they influence the interpretation and the comprehension of stories as well as the emotional response of the reader (Oittinen 2000: 100). They are mostly used in children’s literature but can also be present in products destined for adults (fiction, operator’s manuals, technical instructions and comics). However, in books for children they are crucially important as they “may either strengthen the message through repeating what is said in words or they may add something to the message, something the words do not tell” (Oittinen 2000: 108). They

also have a huge impact on the process of translation, forcing translators to check the consistency of what they render in the target text with what the readers find in the illustrations. The requirement of congruency, and not deviation, is often misinterpreted as a constraint which increases the difficulty of translators' work; yet it guides them through lexical choices and translation strategies (Morini 2016: 37). For example, on the inside of the cover page of *The Vanderbeekers* there is a sketch map of the Harlem district which includes the street where the family live, other places mentioned during the narration like the City College, the library, the Castleman's Bakery, the Harlem Coffee and A to Z Deli. This is a very useful tool for young readers who can better visualize the setting of the story and follow the characters through the streets; furthermore, they help translators sparing them time and space in the effort to add concise but complete explanations to clarify some elements such as the way in which streets are named in the United States.

Wordplay and word musicality usually attract children's attention, arousing their imagination and enriching their sensory experience. It may be interesting to extend what Delabastita suggests when describing the functions of puns to all kind of wordplays: "adding to the thematic coherence of the text, producing humour, forcing the reader/listener into greater attention, adding persuasive force to the statement [...] and so forth" (Delabastita 1996 : ch.1.2). An example of wordplay in *The Vanderbeekers* is that referring to the unit of measure "wpm", "words par minute", which is used as the acronym for "wags par minute": Franz the dog is said to wag its tail "about a 200 on the wpm, or wags par minute, meter" (Glaser 2017: 30). In Italian the corresponding term would be "p/m", "parole al minuto": I chose to preserve the reference to a unit which is actually used in the target culture rendering the passage as "a una velocità media di 200 p/m, pennellate al minute" in the hope that the reader could relate the movement of a dog's tail to that of a paint brush. As concerns word musicality, the source text is rich in onomatopoeia and other sounds which I tried to keep in most cases.

ST – EN	TT-IT
“Yuck,” said Hyacinth	«Puah!» esclamò Viola
tap tap tap (referring to the sound of tapping on the computer)	clic clic clic
Mrs. Castleman preferred to use the antique cash register that made a brisk <i>ka-ching!</i> sound whenever the drawer opened	la signora Castleman preferiva usare ancora quello storico che faceva <i>cha-ching!</i> ogni volta che il cassetto portasoldi veniva aperto

In one passage there are even variations of the same sound:

ST - EN	TT-IT
“I felt” – <i>hiccup</i> – “like I needed to fix” – sob – “what happened this morning” – <i>sniffle</i> – “with breakfast. Well, I spent hours making him” – <i>hiccup</i> – “a placemat, and then I brought it upstairs to him and” – <i>sniff</i> – “I thought I was Hyacinth the Brave but” – sob – “he was the scariest man I’ve ever seen.” Hyacinth’s eyes brimmed with fresh tears.	«Volevo – <i>hic</i> – sistemare – <i>sob</i> – quello che è successo stamani – <i>ecciù</i> – con la colazione. Ci ho messo delle ore a fargli – <i>hic</i> – una tovaglietta, e poi gliel’ho portata di sopra e – <i>ecci</i> – pensavo di essere Viola la Coraggiosa ma – <i>sob</i> – è davvero l’uomo più spaventoso che abbia mai visto». Gli occhi di Viola si riempiono di nuovo di lacrime

With onomatopoeic verbs I did not always manage to keep the musical effects: for instance, I translated *A familiar scuffling was heard outside* with *Dall’esterno giunse uno stropiccio di piedi familiare* and I managed to keep the sound of the shoes on the ground; similarly, in the passage *Ten minutes later, the Vanderbeeker apartment buzzed with kids and parents*, I preserved the “zz” sound of bugs changing the subject of the sentence and employing the Italian verb “ronzare”: “Dieci minuti dopo, l’intera famiglia Vanderbeeker *ronzava* qua e là per l’appartamento”. However, in the case of *the radio buzzed to life* I lost the onomatopoeic effect translating with *la ricetrasmittente si attivò*. In the scene where Hyacinth meets the postman, Mr. Jones, Franz barked twice and *snuffled his nose* into the mailbag. According to OED, “if an animal *snuffles*, it breathes noisily through its nose, especially while it is smelling something”; rendering the sentence as *Franz abbaiò*

due volte e intrufolò il naso nella borsa piena di posta, I loosely kept the “f” sound and lost all the elements mentioned in the definition. However, I tried to compensate losses such as this one in passages like *the brownstone was devoid of the bustle and laughter typical of the Vanderbeeker household* which I rendered as *le mura dell’edificio non rimbombavano dal chiasso e le risate tipici dei Vanderbeeker*, where I employed the verb “rimbombare” to include an additional source of musicality.

Another example of wordplay which may be interesting to examine, as it involves both a substitution and a compensation, is the following one:

ST-EN	TT-IT
<p>“You have a <i>super key</i>?” said Laney, amazed. “Does it have powers? <u>Is it magic?</u>”</p> <p>“He means the <i>superintendent key</i>,” Oliver said, rolling his eyes.</p>	<p>«Hai una <i>chiave universale?</i>» chiese Sofie. «Ha dei poteri? <u>Va nello spazio?</u>»</p> <p>«È la chiave del custode, quella che apre <i>tutte</i> le porte» le rispose Oliver alzando gli occhi al cielo.</p>

The Italian equivalent of “superintendent” may be “custode” and, although the formally and phonetically similar “sovrintendente” exists, it does not refer to someone who is in charge of a building and makes small repairs. Thus, to preserve the wordplay linked to Laney’s misunderstanding of the adjective “super” (she imagines a key with *superpowers*), I needed to shift it to other elements of the passage: “linguistic fidelity had to be rejected in the interest of a greater good – in the final analysis, the entertainment of children” (Taylor 1998: 53). Although the term most used to refer to a key which can open all doors is “chiave passepartout”, I chose “chiave universale”, less frequently used, and I substituted the question “Is it magic?” with “Va nello spazio?”, playing on the semantic correlation of “universale”, “universo” and “spazio”. Then, I changed Oliver’s explanation and placed “tutte” in italics: the adjective “tutto” may be considered a synonym of something which is global, “universale”.

To conclude, the translation process could be defined as an unrecognised art. It is still granted a second-order status being considered as a derivative illusion, a false copy

subordinated to external forces which dictate the constraints to be respected. One of these constraints is fluency: most publishers, reviewers and editors may judge a translated text “acceptable”, when it reads so fluently to be immediately intelligible and easily recognizable; thus, “commodifiable”. This is what Venuti calls the “illusion of transparency” (Venuti 2008: 1). Yet translations are not mere illusions. By definition, illusions are erroneous, inconsistent and even dangerous when imposed on reality; therefore, considering a translation as a mere illusion would mean denying it the recognition as an independent work “demanding in its intellectual complexity, stylistic flair or thematic content” (Lathey 2016: 1) and diminishing the significance a translated text may have on the life and “knowledge experience” of readers.

3.1. Translating strategies and choices

A successful act of communication may require the message of the addressers to be comprehensible to the addressees. As the translation of a book written for children is an act of communication, the need for comprehensibility is essential and it could be fulfilled through readability, which means “ease of reading and understanding determined by linguistic difficulty” (Puurtinen 1998: 2) and speakability, which refers “to the suitability of a text to be read aloud fluently” (Puurtinen 1998: 2).

Having identified comprehensibility as one of the main “functions” of my translation, my aim was to produce a comprehensible text, fluently readable, out loud or not, and “functionally adequate”, using an expression crucial in the work of Vermeer and Reiss, who stressed the importance of the translation’s *skopos* or purpose (1958/1995 cited in Munday 2016: 127). To do so, two rules guided my work: the coherence rule, which stresses the importance for the target text to make sense for the target readers, and the fidelity rule, which states that there should be interpreting coherence between the source text and the target text in terms of information, given and received.

I also tried to be “loyal” both to the assumed target audience of the translated text, children from 7 to 11, and to the author of the original text. I struggled to fit the

complexity of the source text to the norms of the target literary system, respecting the linguistic level and world knowledge of the main receivers, with the aim of encouraging them to read and arousing their curiosity. As a consequence, I chose to keep most of the elements that they may not know but that they could find interesting to explore, being careful not to scare them and ruin their reading experience. I tried to resist the temptation to over-simplify or delete passages and references, such as the cultural ones, which could be considered too challenging, and to renounce the rhythm and musicality which are distinctive features of the source text and central in books often meant to be read aloud, both by adults and children. It seems to me that being faithful to the original author and text may not be fulfilled by presenting a translation which is literal or “word-for-word” (Munday 2016: 32) but retaining the meanings rather than the words.

In the following passages I will outline the most relevant translating strategies I adopted to provide a translation which could be read as fluently as the source text, losing as fewer original elements as possible. However, it could be relevant to highlight that translation cannot escape manipulation: adjustments can be limited but not completely avoided because the source text and the target text belong to systems which, being culturally and linguistically different, represent the world in ways which cannot be expected to coincide. “Not only the grammatical, lexical, and phonological features of their language (for example, teenage talk, professional jargon, political rhetoric) differentiate them from others: but also the topics they choose to talk about, the way they present information [...] their discourse accent” (Kramersch 1998: 7). According to Oittinen:

An original, the first text, and its translation, the second text, are invariably different, as the translation has been manipulated (in the positive sense) by its translator [...] the very act of translation always involves change and domestication. The change of language always brings the story closer to the target-language audience. (Oittinen 2000:6)

Similarly, Shavit states: “the translator is permitted to manipulate the texts in various ways by changing, enlarging, or abridging it or by deleting or adding to it” (Shavit 1987: 112). However, she also specifies that all these “liberties” must fit the “prevailing” perceptions of what is appropriate, useful and comprehensible to the young reader, excluding all type of taboos (such as alcohol, sex, violence, excretion, bad manners, adult faults) which is what I tried to combat in my translation being firmly convinced that this kind of “liberty” only demonstrates to what degree adults could undervalue children’s

ability to comprehend and show empathy. To give an example, death has often been considered an adult issue and, as underlined by Oittinen, “has often been something to avoid in children’s literature, even though it is a central theme both in folk tales and in fairy tales by authors like H. C. Andersen and the Grimm brothers”(Oittinen 2000: 91) . In *The Vanderbeekers of 141st street* death plays a fundamental role in the happy ending of the story: the five children are shocked to discover that their monstrous landlord have lost both his wife and daughter in a car accident and they immediately change their attitude towards the man, feeling sorry for him and realizing how lonely and angry he must feel. The book also includes an article which gives the details of the accident defined as a “horrible scene” because the victims have been “struck by a car” (Glaser, K. Y. 2017 :216). I strongly believe that all these elements should not be omitted in the translation for fear of “corrupting” the supposed “naivety” and “purity” of the target readers. That would only represent a lack of respect.

On the whole, in order to fulfill fluency and comprehensibility requirements, I generally tried to “normalize” the source text to the target linguistic system, to make explicit some of its elements and to simplify both lexis, syntax and style to achieve greater transparency. Normalization, equivalence and simplification are mentioned by Baker (2001: 289) as some of the universals of translation, that is to say the “linguistic features which typically occur in translated rather than original texts”.

Normalization consists in “shifts in punctuation, lexical choice, style, sentence structure and textual organization [...] manifestations of a general ‘tendency towards textual conventionality’ apparently approved of by the target audience” (Vanderauwera 1985 cited in Baker 2001: 289). I reordered syntactic units, to make them familiar to the target audience, reversing the position of some linguistic elements, rearranging the punctuation patterns to join short phrases which could make too fragmented a rhythm for Italian readers and, finally, postponing or anticipating some elements. As Taylor states: “it is often necessary for whole phrases or clauses to be re-ordered. Meaning is first carried in semantic units rather than in syntagmatic patterns, and thus a certain grammatical ‘skewing’, or rearranging, is often required” (Taylor 1998: 61).

ST-EN	TT-IT
<p>“Nothing like double chocolate pecan cookies to comfort the tummy and the soul, <u>I always say.</u>”</p> <p>She knotted a wide lavender ribbon around her waist to complete the look</p> <p>“Our landlord isn’t renewing our lease. We just found out.”</p>	<p>«<u>Come dico sempre</u>, non c’è niente di meglio che cookies al doppio cioccolato e noci per rallegrare stomaco e spirito.»</p> <p>Come tocco finale, aveva abbinato un nastro largo color lavanda che si era legata in vita</p> <p>«Abbiamo appena saputo che il proprietario di casa non ci rinnova l’affitto»</p>
<p>The Beiderman lived on the brownstone’s third floor. He was a seriously unpleasant man. He was also their landlord.</p> <p>The twins had been responsible for preparing the family meal on Tuesdays since they turned twelve earlier that year</p>	<p>Il Beiderman viveva al terzo piano della palazzina e oltre ad essere un uomo davvero spiacevole era anche il loro padrone di casa.</p> <p>Da quando, qualche mese prima, le gemelle avevano compiuto dodici anni, erano diventate le responsabili della cena del giovedì</p>
<p>The kids watched her rush up the stairs, then heard her say, “Yes, Ms. Mitchell, thank you for calling. We’re very interested in that apartment you listed –” <u>followed by her bedroom door shutting.</u></p> <p>“Okay, I see multiple problems.” <u>She ticked them off on her fingers.</u> “One – he doesn’t like us. Two – we have no money. Three – none of us has actually seen or met the Beiderman and we know</p>	<p>Tutti e cinque la seguirono con gli occhi mentre saliva le scale e, <u>prima che chiudesse la porta</u>, le sentirono dire: «Sì, signora Mitchell, grazie per avermi chiamato. Siamo molto interessati all’appartamento in vendita...»</p> <p>«Allora, primo, non gli piacciamo. Secondo, non abbiamo soldi. Terzo, non sappiamo niente su di lui perché nessuno di noi l’ha mai incontrato davvero.</p>

nothing about him. Four – he doesn't want to be disturbed. Five – he doesn't like us.”	Quarto, non vuole essere disturbato. Quinto, non gli piacciamo» <u>disse</u> <u>contando i problemi sulle dita di una mano</u>
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Another example in this regard may be the opening of chapter two.

ST-EN	TT-IT
<u>La 141^a strada era stretta ed alberata.</u> Procedendo verso nord, si innalzavano una serie di edifici disposti uno di fianco all'altro, come in schieramento	The northern side of 14st Street was buffered by brownstones standing shoulder to shoulder, as if marching in formation

The translation slightly differs from the source text opening: in the target text I anticipated an information given further on in the original text which helped introducing the description of the street, which occupies the first three pages of the chapter, and providing the reader with a more effective opening line.

Explicitation refers to a number of techniques which expand the target text through the insertion of additional words, aimed at improving readability (Baker 2001: 289). “English is generally reputed to be more succinct than Italian, though often this is more a question of style than linguistics” (Taylor 1998: 57). It tends towards concision creating strings of adjectives and nouns, lexically-dense noun-phrases, while Italian counterparts are “constrained by Italian syntax into containing verbs, adjectivals and complex adverbial and/or prepositional phrases” (Taylor 1998: 58). As a consequence, sometimes I was forced to “amplify” some adjectives and verbal expressions both to preserve as more elements as possible and “for reasons of greater comprehensibility” (Taylor 1998: 55).

ST-EN	TT-IT
<u>sun-warmed plank</u>	sull'asse <u>intiepidita dalla luce del sole</u>
Panda-Laney <u>peered around</u> the kitchen island	Sofie-Panda <u>si mosse guardinga intorno</u> all'isola della cucina

“Of course,” <u>scoffed</u> Jessie	«Sicuro» le <u>rispose</u> Jessie <u>con tono da saputella</u>
Papa <u>scanned</u> the living room	Gli occhi del papà <u>passarono in rassegna</u> il salotto
“ <u>Potential disastrous situation</u> here at one-seven-seven West One-Four-One Street,” Oliver said. “Immediate attention required. How copy?”	«Qui <u>codice rosso</u> all’uno-sette-sette, strada uno-quattro-uno, direzione ovest. Si richiede massima attenzione. Ricevuto?»

Before discussing other cases of explicitation, I would like to examine in greater depth the translation of the last example in this table: “potential disastrous situation”. It shows the English “strings tendency” I mentioned above and if it was rendered literally in Italian it would result in: “situazione che potrebbe diventare un disastro/disastrosa”. Thus, looking for a way to avoid amplifying the text, I made use of co-textual elements, which are linked to the walkie-talkie code used by Oliver and Jimmy to communicate, and found a compact expression which could give a clear idea of imminent danger: “codice rosso”.

Length constraints are to be taken into consideration when translating, for editorial and quality reasons. The examples just mentioned may show why Italian translations tend to be longer than their English originals (Scarpa 2001 cited in Hyland et al. 2012 :73). Therefore, I tried to “compensate” the amplification of some passages with the reduction of other passages where I managed to “gain space” without losing on meaning.

ST-EN	TT-IT
a living room <u>that flowed into an open</u> kitchen	salotto e cucina <u>comunicanti</u>
a <u>walk-in-closet-turned-bedroom</u> where Oliver lived	<u>un’ex cabina armadio</u> , ora camera di Oliver
with her I’m-right-and-no-one-can-convince-me-otherwise voice	con fare da sapientina

After a lunch of grab <u>whatever-you can-from-the-fridge</u>	Dopo un bel pranzo <u>svuotafrigo</u>
announced <u>with a scowl on his face</u>	annunciò <u>imbronciato</u>

Continuing my analysis of the techniques referring to the translation strategy of explicitation, I added some elements to the target text in order to give target readers some contextual information or not to lose some cultural references. As stated by Taylor (1998: 55), amplification may be a useful strategy when the source text takes for granted cultural, semantic or linguistic components whose connections need to be made explicit to the target readers.

ST-EN	TT-IT
with the USPS sonic eagle logo	con il logo della USPS, <u>l'agenzia postale per cui lavorava</u>
her impeccable posture making her look stage-ready for Carnegie Hall	con la sua postura perfetta sembrava pronta a esibirsi al Carnegie Hall, <u>teatro di fama mondiale</u>
who lived in Westchester	che vivevano <u>più a nord, nella zona di Westchester.</u>

In other cases, I made explicit elements which are not mentioned in the source text in order to find a “proper” equivalent translation in Italian (“tavolino”) or to add extra information which could help readers visualize the scene.

ST-EN	TT-IT
owlish windows	le finestre a forma di cerchio, come gli occhi di un gufo
agonizing over	scervellandosi
the <u>table</u> next to the door	<u>tavolino</u> accanto alla porta

“Hello!” she said with a big, apologetic smile	«Eccomi!» disse <u>scusandosi per l’irruenza</u> con un grande sorriso
<u>bird</u> lady	ragazza <u>struzzo</u>

In the last example, I was helped by the explanation of the nickname’s origin which is mentioned by the narrating voice (*she resembled a crane, with her long skinny legs and pointy beak nose*). Paganini, one of the pets of the Vanderbeekers, is a “lop-eared bunny”, a type of rabbit whose ears drop on the ground and are not carried erect. In Italian, it is called “coniglio ariete” and I chose not to preserve the specific term and I added a brief explanation which could help the reader to visualize the bunny and continue the reading: *Paganini, her lop-eared bunny > Paganini, il suo coniglietto grigio dalle lunghe orecchie piegate all’ingiù”.*

Compensation is another common technique employed by translators struggling to find a strategy to minimize the inevitable “lost in translation” (Munday 2016: 92). I tried to find alternatives to keep elements which are not essential for the understanding of the text but represent interesting stylistic features. In some passages, for instance, I kept the reference to foreign languages replacing the original elements in order to produce the same effect on the target audience.

ST-EN	TT-IT
“I’m sure Señor Paz will right appreciate these,” Mr. Jones replied, tucking the bag carefully into his pocket. He said <i>sure</i> the same way Hyacinth said <i>shore</i> .	«Sono <u>seguro</u> che al señor Paz piaceranno moltissimo» le rispose il signor Jones sistemandosi per bene il sacchetto in tasca.
“Attention! I need this table set, <u>pronto!</u> ”	«Attenzione! Mi serve la tavola apparecchiata, <u>andale!</u> »

However, as mentioned above, some loss was inevitable as in the scene where Hyacinth meets the postman and gives him *dog treats to pass out* which I rendered as *tanti croccantini da distribuire*, not preserving the reference to “faint” which could be linked to what the man had previously told the girl: dogs “go to heaven” when taste her

treats. Another example could be the translation of Laney’s *stout body* with *corpo cicciettello* losing “stout” also connoting “brave” and “determined” which could be interesting adjectives to associate to the little girl.

Simplification is another universal of translation; it may be of three types: lexical, syntactic and stylistic (Baker 2001: 288). From a lexical point of view:

Spesso la buona riuscita di una traduzione dipende dalla capacità di trasformare le frasi di partenza non solo dal punto di vista sintattico (ordine delle parole), ma anche da quello morfologico, bisogna cioè abituarsi all’idea di trasformare un verbo in aggettivo, un aggettivo in sostantivo e via dicendo, a seconda di ciò che è più naturale in italiano. (Morini 2016: 26)

This suggestion by Morini recalls the strategy named “transposition” in the taxonomy by Vinay and Dalbernet which refers to “the change of one part of speech to another” (Munday 2016: 90).

ST-EN	TT-IT
as if marching in formation	come in schieramento
It’s bookmarked under <i>Recipes</i>	La trovi nella sezione <i>Ricette</i>
Christmas Eve dinner <u>rival</u> Thanksgiving dinner <u>in scope and quality</u>	la cena doveva essere <u>tanto buona ed abbondante quanto</u> quella per la festa del ringraziamento
huffed in frustration	sbuffò seccata

According to Vinay and Dalbernet, shifts are inevitable in translation and changes do not affect only parts of speech but also the semantics or points of view of the source text which may be “modulated” as in the following examples (Vinay and Dalbernet 1958/1995 cited in Munday 2016: 90).

ST-EN	TT-IT
I haven’t <u>bounced a basketball</u> in front of the building in months	È da mesi che <u>non gioco a basket</u> davanti casa
Outside the door	davanti alla porta
I can’t imagine not living here	Non riesco a immaginarci in un’altra casa

He can't take away your home	Non può buttarvi fuori casa
What about beef stew? <u>How hard could that be?</u>	Che ne pensi di uno spezzatino di manzo? <u>Non credo sia difficile.</u>

From a syntactic point of view, I avoided using **passive structures**, which could have negative effects on readability as they obscure the participants of the actions, replacing them with active forms or impersonal *si*-constructions (Taylor 1998: 63).

ST-EN	TT-IT
The northern side of 141st Street <u>was buffered by</u> brownstones standing shoulder to shoulder, as if marching in formation	La 141 ^{aa} strada era stretta ed alberata. Procedendo verso nord, <u>si innalzavano</u> una serie di edifici disposti uno di fianco all'altro, come in schieramento
Mr. Jones <u>was dressed in</u> his usual navy blue parka	Il signor Jones <u>indossava</u> il solito impermeabile blu
Hyacinth always had her best ideas when <u>surrounded by</u> her favorite things	A Viola le idee migliori venivano quando <u>si circondava</u> delle sue cose preferite

Moreover, I did not render *-ly* English adverbs with Italian adverbs which end in *-mente*, choosing between several available solutions: I replaced them with an adjective, with an adverb without the *-mente* suffix or with a different grammatical structure. Although the number of this type of adverbs has been increasing in the Italian basic Vocabulary in Use since the beginning of the 21st century (De Cesare 2018: 206), they are not frequently used in the spoken language as they are generally perceived as formal; thus, they may not sound familiar to Italian young readers. By way of illustration, rendering the English adverb “really” as “veramente” would sound less familiar and more formal than using the adverbs “davvero”, “proprio”.

ST-EN	TT-IT
<u>falsely</u> cheery voice	<u>finto</u> tono allegro

I'm <u>really</u> sorry about this	mi dispiace <u>tantissimo</u>
I <u>really</u> hope it wasn't my violin playing that caused all this	Spero <u>proprio</u> che non sia tutta colpa mia
Do you think we'll <u>really</u> stay in Harlem?	Pensate che rimarremo <u>davvero</u> ad Harlem
[...] the pipes rumbled companionably [...] she took macarons <u>very seriously</u> Franz swallowed it whole and shamelessly rummaged through the mailbag for more	[...] le tubature brontolavano la loro presenza [...] prendeva <u>molto sul serio</u> i suoi macarons Franz lo ingoiò tutto intero e, senza vergogna, riconficò il naso nella borsa per averne un altro

Stylistic simplification is defined by Baker as:

The tendency to break up long sequences and sentences, replacing elaborate phraseology with shorter collocations, reducing or omitting repetitions and redundant information, shortening overlong circumlocutions and leaving out modifying phrases and words. (Baker 2001: 289)

In the following passages, I will give some examples in this regard especially talking about dialogues and descriptions.

Dialogues are very frequent in children's literature as they are "central to the development of character and plot [...] Spoken exchanges drive narrative momentum, but they also offer respite from lengthy descriptive or explanatory passages that they may seem daunting to young readers" (Lathey 2016: 71). Morini states that they should be quite rapid, rather informal and sufficiently realistic (Morini 2016: 18). Following his suggestion, I tried to make direct speech "speakable" ("recitabile" in Morini 2016: 52): I did not translate it word-for-word, but I let it "stray from the literal only inasmuch as the rules of (Italian) grammar dictate it" (Taylor 1998 :49), to make it sound as natural as possible to the target reader. I struggled to preserve its steady and fast rhythm resisting

the temptation to scatter it with framing verbs like “chiese”, “disse”, “aggiunse” especially when not present in the source text or when strictly necessary. I also omitted some redundant elements, as in the example which follows, reducing some parts of the source text

ST-EN	TT-IT
<p>“Wouldn’t it be amazing if we could get the Beiderman to come?” Isa mused. “<u>If the Beiderman ends up at our dinner table</u>, it will be a Christmas miracle,” replied Jessie.</p>	<p>«Non sarebbe fantastico se riuscissimo a far venire anche il Beiderman?» pensò Isa ad alta voce. «Sarebbe proprio un miracolo di Natale» commentò Jessie.</p>

Descriptions may be difficult to translate, too. As Morini suggests, they should not be translated in too fragmented a way and guided by the dictionary, but they should be understood, if not even imagined, and rewritten (Morini 2016: 19). This strategy was useful when I dealt with actions (*She pulled at the hems of the shirtsleeves and balled the ends into her fists*. > [...] disse tirando con le dita i bordi delle maniche e arrotolandoli nei pugni) as well as with characters, locations and emotions. On the whole, the source text presents three difficult descriptive passages: the one which describes some buildings on 141st street, the one which explicates the way in which the water wall made by Jessie for Isa’s birthday works and the one which refers to Rube Goldberg machines. In the first two passages, the illustrations, included in the text, have played a fundamental role clearly showing what Morini means when he says that pictures may be bonds but also resources (Morini 2016: 37). *Jessie carefully positioned the water bottle in the wire cage* > *Facendo attenzione, avvolse la bottiglia nel filo metallico*; this extract is taken from the water wall scene and without examining the illustration and reflecting on “wire” and “cage”, I would never have thought to substitute the verb “posizionare” with “avvolgere” so to simplify the translation of “wire cage” which I have rendered as “filo metallico”.

Changes can affect stylistic or structural means depending on the ways in which two languages describe the same situations as for idiomatic expressions. Linguists have defined the “arbitrariness” of the linguistic sign – as well as the combination of different linguistic signs – as “the way in which different languages divide up the spectrum of

reality in terms of meanings (which) differs from one language to another” (Herbst 2008: 16): each language articulates, organizes and categorizes the world in way which sometimes may diverge especially from the lexical point of view. The concept of “arbitrariness” can be also extended to every idiom which may be defined as “a lexical complex which is semantically complex” (Cruise in Herbst 2008: 134): it is a multi-word lexeme which can take different forms (noun phrase, predicate, sentence or phrasal verbs) and it combines more than one lexical constituents whose combination results in a unit of meaning (Herbst 2008: 134): these constituents and their combinations are wholly arbitrary. Therefore, in order to translate one idiom, it is often necessary to understand its meaning and find an “equivalent” expression in the target text which employs different means to convey the same situation. In children’s literature idioms are very important because, as they are used especially in spoken language, they are a constituent part of dialogues. Following a suggestion offered by Lathey (2016: 100), I tried to preserve the main function of the source text’s idiomatic expressions replacing them with their Italian equivalents; the alternative could have been to translate them literally and, if necessary, introducing some explicative elements. What may be interesting to highlight is that Lathey also refers to idioms as “a starting point for creativity” (Lathey 2016: 98) which is a key requirement to authors and translators of books destined to young readers.

ST-EN	TT-IT
Oliver, who was nine years old and <u>wise to the ways of the world</u>	Oliver, che a nove anni <u>aveva già capito come girava il mondo</u>
“ <u>On the bright side,</u> ” Mama said	« <u>Vediamo il lato positivo</u> » disse la mamma
Mama sure <u>fought dirty</u> when she wanted to	La mamma sapeva <u>giocare sporco</u> quando voleva

I would like to examine in greater depth the idiomatic expression “spill the beans” which I rendered as “fare una soffiata” even if “sputare il rospo” could be more familiar to an Italian native speaker. However, in the source text “spill the beans” is referred to Laney, the youngest of the Vanderbecker, who is also nicknamed “Laney-bean” by her

father; the bond is not made explicit in the source text and it may be a forcing interpretation but I chose to preserve the ambiguity through maintaining the assonance between “Sofficino” (the nickname I chose for the “Italian” Laney, Sophie) and “fare una soffiata”. Another example of equivalent correspondents, adapted to target linguistic system, may be those referring to specific items.

ST-EN	TT-IT
She opened up the <u>search engine</u>	Entrò su <u>internet</u>
black <u>slip-resistant</u> shoes	scarpe nere <u>antinfortunistica</u>
<u>etudes</u> – short study pieces her music teacher insisted she practiced every day	<u>studi</u> , esercitazioni brevi che, su insistenza del suo insegnante, doveva ripetere ogni giorno

The last thing I would like to discuss in the present analysis is the translation of spoken language. Informal and slang expressions have always been a considerable challenge for literary translators as “recreating the tone, register and verisimilitude of passages of dialogues in the target language therefore requires a great sensitivity to social register as well as an awareness of attitudes towards the acceptability of the vernacular children’s fiction in the target culture” (Lathey 2016:76). Moreover, editorial pressures have often required them to be censored and standardized lest readers would be encouraged to develop bad habits of speech, daily employed at home and on the street (Lathey 2016: 76). However, thanks to a new understanding of children’s needs and sensitivity there has been an increase in the liberalization of educational policy on spoken language (Lathey 2016: 75). Yet, informal and slang expressions pose a challenge to translators also because their direct equivalents are rarely found in the target language; thus, “it is often a case of trying to give the whole paragraph a similar tone, rather than worrying too much about specific phrases” (Chambers 2001, cited in Lathey 2016: 78).

Interestingly, investigating the life of slang, Julia Coleman states: “slang is a subject that provokes strong emotions. [...] If you use slang, you ran the risk of being judged crass, uneducated, stupid, or hopelessly out of date, but the rewards are equally great: used, correctly, slang will ease your entry into the social circles you want to mix in [...]” (Coleman 2012, ix). As it was difficult to find the Italian correspondents for most

colloquial expressions in *The Vanderbeekers* which could cover all the nuances of the original elements, I tried to render them by looking for expressions which are familiar to young Italian native speakers and could fulfil the same function (insulting, swearing, etc.). In fact, my aim was to avoid standardizing informal and colloquial expressions as they provide a sense of authenticity and boost readers' identification and interest through the socializing function of spoken language.

By way of illustration, I rendered "What a punk!" as "Che sfigato!". In the source text the expression is shouted by Oliver who refers to "the Beiderman", who does not want to renew their lease for no evident reason. According to the online site of Urban dictionary "punk" can be used as an insult, while in *NTC's Dictionary of American Slang and Colloquial Expressions* may have four possible acceptations: it may refer to an inexperienced boy or youth, a (male) juvenile delinquent, a poor, dull and inferior person or to someone having to do with punkers and their music (NTC Dictionary 2000 : 326). Given the context, I considered the first and the third senses and I chose the word "sfigato" which is popular in Italian youth language, frequently used to insult someone considered insignificant, dull and even inferior, often for economic and social reasons¹⁷.

ST-EN	TT-IT
Fudge!	Cavolo!
that freaking dungeon	quella cavolo di gattabuia
Not for me silly.	Non per me, scemotta.
What a punk!	Che sfigato!
Rotten Beiderman	Il Beiderman è solo un vecchio bacucco.

¹⁷ www.treccani.it/vocabolario/sfigato

CHAPTER 4 To adapt, or not to adapt, that is the question

Anything can be adapted. Names can be domesticated, the setting localized ... we domesticate for children, for minority cultures, for political ideas, for religious beliefs. Whether ... it is carried out for reasons of propriety or for educational purposes, depends on the situation. Texts may also be domesticated because of political pressures, censorship, and differing moral values or child images. (Oittinen 2000: 19)

“The translation of texts for children is also influenced by educational, pedagogical and editorial forces that can push the translator to simplify the vocabulary and syntax of the original text, and therefore its style; adding judgements and comments not present in the original, making cuts, etc.” (Paruolo 2010: 20)

The “accuracy” and “correctness” of a translation has often been judged according to the equivalence between the source text and the target text or, in other words, how far the original text has been adapted to “fit” a target culture. Equivalence is a central and controversial concept in translation theory: it is “variously regarded as a necessary condition for translation, an obstacle to progress in translation studies, or a useful category for describing translations” (Baker, 1998: 77). Therefore, equivalence and adaptation, theoretical terms often related, are the subjects of a debate which is still open. Nida, for instance, defines translation in terms of equivalence (1964 in Baker, 1988: 77) and offers “naturalness” as the main goal of translators, who need to adjust the grammar, lexicon and cultural references of the source text to meet the receivers’ linguistic needs and cultural expectations. His approach is target-oriented and based on two strategies or types of equivalence whose aim is to achieve a complete naturalness of expression through the nearest approximation between the source text and target text in terms of the form and content of the message – formal equivalence – and the effect produced on the readers – dynamic equivalence – (1964 in Munday 2016: 68). From another viewpoint, Baker “uses the notion of equivalence ‘for the sake of convenience – because most translators are used to it rather than because it has any theoretical status’” (Baker 1998: 77).

Some researchers try to demonstrate the impossibility of achieving the same “effect” and others describe this effort to produce “sameness” in extremely negative terms: for example, replacing the term “adaptation” with “domestication”, Lawrence Venuti defines it in terms of “appropriation” and “control”, stating that the “domesticating” method is

essentially the manifestation of a cultural colonialism interested in the violent appropriation of the linguistic and cultural elements (Venuti 2008: 38). On the other hand, he defines a “foreignizing” translation as “a form of resistance against the ethnocentrism and racism, cultural narcissism and imperialism, in the interests of democratic geopolitical relation” (Venuti 2008: 20). Therefore, translating is an issue of “power”, applying an ethno-deviant or ethno-centric pressure on the source text. As mentioned in the previous chapter, translation may be defined as an act of power: translators may seem to be autonomous in deciding the methods and strategies used during a translation process, while their choices are often dependent and influenced by the values and expectations of the social and historical context they live in, which also determines a specific and shared idea of childhood. They are supposed to meet the “expectations” of their readers: the target text is destined for a specific speech community, whose members do not share only the same linguistic code but also a “social identity” shaped by specific formal rules of etiquette, expressions of politeness, social *dos* and *don'ts*, a common experience, which is inevitably at the basis of the choice of words referring to specific facts, ideas or events (Kramersch 1998 :3).

Oittinen (2000) agrees with Venuti (2008) when she defines translation as an issue of power but she questions his polar approach, domestication versus foreignization, which denigrates every translating strategy involving a manipulation of the source text and promotes the idea, shared by other researchers, that adaptation and translation are two separate things, the first one less valuable, being a mere imitation, an abridged version. From a different viewpoint, Oittinen states that concepts such as “equivalence” and “adaptation” are too vague and that “all translation involves adaptation, and the very act of translation always involves change and domestication” (Oittinen 2000: 6). Translators cannot avoid being influenced by their own culture and language.

If we try to define adaptation and translation as separate issues, we face a dilemma, as we are actually mixing terms on different levels: when translating, we are always adapting our texts for certain purposes and certain readers, both children and adults [...] Domestication is part of translation, and not a parallel process. There is no real methodological difference between the two. (Oittinen 2000: 84)

In children’s literature adaptation is a translation strategy which could be adopted for several reasons, such as helping young readers to “understand better” the text or making

a book more appealing to their parents, and it may reflect the adult authoritarian will to “educate” children. While some researchers such as Shavit (1986 in Oittinen 2000: 85) label adaptation as bad, being a sign of nonappreciation and disrespect towards the original text and author, as well as a copy which may result in denaturing and pedagogizing literature destined for young readers, Oittinen (2000) stresses that translation cannot escape transformation: “translation is not an issue of unity but of recreation and deviation, ‘turning’ the original ‘into a new and unexpected form’” (Oittinen 2000:80).

From a similar point of view, Lathey admits that “a pragmatic degree of adaptation may be necessary to endure the children read translations at all” (Lathey 2016: 37). However, she states that children could actually enjoy the sound and sight of non-familiar words and expressions such as those denoting foodstuffs, cultural practices and greeting formula. She suggests several strategies which could be used to translate cultural items: they could be borrowed and, if necessary, marked in italics or inserted in a glossary, especially when the assumed receivers are older children or young adults; they could be replaced by carefully-researched culture-specific items; finally, on rare occasions, they could be omitted to avoid tediously long explanations which cannot be add in footnotes, not being a suitable solution in children’s books (Lathey 2016: 43).

Readers’ cognitive abilities and background knowledge are not to be underrated, nor overrated, especially in children’s literature. Translating *The Vanderbecker of 141st street*, I needed to consider the age of the assumed main receivers of the book, children from 7 to 11, who could be familiar with American culture, thanks to television, cartoons and songs. Thus, I could not keep the original forms of words and expressions, even if in italics or adding glossary entries, as suggested by Lathey (Lathey 2016: 41); thus, I replaced them with the Italian correspondents which could sound more familiar to children, or at least to their parents or older siblings (*maple* > *sciropo d’acero*, *peanut butter* > *burro di arachidi*, *Thanksgiving* > *festa del ringraziamento*). However, I preserved the original form of those items already in use in the target context: *cheesecake* and *jazz*. As regards *cookies*, I kept the original form when it refers to the *double chocolate pecan cookies* or non-specified types of cookies, as target children may be familiar with the image of a round biscuit with some chocolate drops on it. By contrast, in order to translate *jam cookies*, inspired by some photos and recipes on the internet, I

chose *biscotti alla marmellata*, just to evoke a similar image in the target readers' mind. Then, I also preserved the reference to the *Star Wars* saga not rendering it as *Guerre Stellari*, as both forms are actually used among Italian speakers, while I translated *The Lord of the Rings* with *Il signore degli anelli*, which is the form more commonly used by the target natives.

Any discussion of culture-bound language must cover the whole range of human experience, from geographical to institutional terms to culture-specific terminology referring to ways of life, social organization, local customs, material artefacts and so on. (Taylor 1998 :103)

In the following paragraphs, I will discuss some of the translation strategies, introduced in the previous chapter, which I adopted in dealing with the cultural references *The Vanderbeekers* source text is sprinkled with. In order to help me structure the analysis, I divide them into three groups: food references, social and intertextual references and geographical references. Inspired by Paruolo's idea that "there is no point in translating a book if it loses all trace of the country where it comes from" (Paruolo 2010: 52), I struggled to limit adaptation, unavoidable in some cases, when strictly necessary not just to help readers "understanding" better but mainly to convey the spirit, intentions and impressions of the original text in order to arouse the same effect and response of the source readers in the target audience.

For example, at the beginning of the story the Vanderbeeker children ask their parents the reasons why Mr. Beiderman would want them to leave the apartment. Their father recalls some previous episodes which have bothered the landlord, such as Oliver hitting his window playing with a baseball and Franz, the dog, using his front door like a fire hydrant. Even if baseball is not so common a sport in Italy as soccer may be, I did not replace the element with "palla da calcio", translating it with "palla da baseball". Yet, I changed strategy with "fire hydrant" which I rendered as "cespuglio": Italian children are not used to see red fire hydrants on the streets but on the walls. Thus, I could have looked for a way to better contextualise the reference but in doing so I would have lost the immediacy of the father referring to the episode which is a funny image for the reader: the dog raising a leg and peeing outside the door of the Beiderman's apartment with an air of nonchalance, as if it was any fire hydrant on the street. Finally, I chose to maintain the same immediacy in the amused response of the reader and I "sacrificed" the original referent replacing it with one which could be more familiar to Italian children.

Food Referents

ST – EN	TT - IT
Bosenberry	Mora gigante
Cookies Jam cookies Double chocolate pecan cookies	Cookies Biscotti alla marmellata Cookies doppio cioccolato e noci
Granola bars	Barrette d’avena
Lavender macarons	Macaron alla lavanda
Cheesy bread	Pane al formaggio
Maple Hickory nuts	Sciroppo d’acero Noci di hickory
Peanut butter (dog treats)	(croccantini al) Burro di arachidi
Beef stew	Spezzatino di manzo
Strawberry cheesecake Carrot cake	Cheesecake alle fragole Torta di carote
Tea Fanta	Tè Fanta
Anchovy casserole	Sformato di acciughe
Cheese croissant	Cornetti al formaggio
Candy cane	Bastoncino di zucchero
Cilantro	Coriandolo

What children in other countries eat or drink is something that may awake the interest of the target audience towards a foreign culture (Klingberg 1986 in Paruolo 2010: 52).

I kept the original forms only of those items used in the target culture: *cheesecake* (even if made with “fragole” and not “strawberry”), *Fanta* (without replacing it with

“aranciata”, which could be a potential alternative in the Italian language) and *cookies*. In most cases I adapted the items which might not sound familiar to Italian children, with a limited level of English, to the target language.

ST-EN	TT-IT
Carrot cake	Torta di carote
Granola bars	Barrette d’avena
Lavender macarons	Macaron alla lavanda
Beef stwe	Spezzatino di manzo
Tea	Tè
Candy canes	Bastoncini di zucchero

As concerns *boysenberry*, which is a cross between a raspberry and blackberry, I did not find a corresponding term in Italian so I used a periphrasis looking at the online images of the fruit: it seems to resemble a giant blackberry, a “mora gigante”. I did not add other elements because the term is used by Jessie to refer to what her friend Allegra resembles in a prom dress; thus, I would have ruined the immediacy of the funny reference. Online images guided my translation choice in other two cases: *anchovy casserole* and *cheesy bread*. In the case of *anchovy casserole*, the choice could be between “sformato di acciughe” e “tegame di acciughe”. In the end, I chose *tegame di acciughe*, losing the possible reference to the cooking method, as the Vanderbecker family is biracial, maybe of South American or Mediterranean origins, and so the dish, cooked by their grandmother, could refer to a Spanish or Italian dish. As concerns *cheesy bread*, it may be interpreted as a loaf of bread filled with cheese but it is actually dough cooked in the oven inside greased loaf pans and whose resulting appearance could resemble what is known in Italian as “plumcake”, even if this refers to something usually sweet and mainly eaten for breakfast or as a snack. Moreover, Italian children would be not too familiar with *banana breads* whose recipe is present in many Italian cooking sites and books which preserve the original name. Thus, I rendered *cheesy bread* as *pane al formaggio* in order to make readers visualise the same form of the source readers and not to lose the reference to the following term “slices”.

According to Taylor: “the most serious culture-based problems that beset translators are to be found among the many lexical items and expressions that contain, always or on some occasions, a potentially incomprehensible or misleading cultural aspect” (Taylor 1998: 105). Among the examples, he cites breakfast, which can be rendered as “prima colazione”, though he specifies that the conceptual gap between the two “equivalents” is in what is typically eaten for breakfast in the countries involved. An example may be “cheese croissant”: in Italy people are not used to eat salty breakfast, which are the “norm” in a lot of other countries. However, I preferred to translate the original term literally with “cornetti al formaggio”: target readers may be not familiar with this eating habit but that does not mean that they cannot understand it.

The last two elements I will mention in the present analysis of food items are *hickory nuts* and *cilantro*, which may be present in numerous American kitchens but not in Italian ones. *Cilantro* is a herb which may resemble parsley but merely in appearance, having a completely different taste, stronger and more refreshing. I chose to translate it literally with *coriandolo* without replacing it with “prezzemolo”, often used in Italian daily dishes. Similarly, I left the reference to a specific type of nuts, the “hickory” nuts, native to North America: the element is introduced as an ingredient of a very difficult recipe that Mama suggests to Isa and Jessie (both twelve years old) to cook for Christmas Eve dinner; thus, the reference to the specific type of nuts could help to create an actual sense of “difficulty” also in the target reader.

Social and Intertextual References

ST – EN	TT – IT
Thanksgiving	Festa del ringraziamento
Captain Kidd	Capitano Kidd
Big Zee → YO	Big Zee
Duke Ellington	Duke Ellington
Rockie Balboa	Rockie Balboa

Rube Goldberg	Rube Goldberg
Magic Jay - Magic Johnson	Magic J - Magic Johnson
Mike L. Jordan	Maikol Jordan
Current <u>ETA</u> for basketball game on Sunday is fourteen hundred hours	Siamo d'accordo per <u>l'allenamento</u> di basket di domenica
Lindy hop	Swing
Jazz music	Musica jazz
Fire hadrant	Cespuglio
Seventh grade	Seconda media
Eight grade	Terza media
Eight grade dance Prom	Ballo dell'ultimo anno Ballo dell'ultimo anno
Penny	centesimo
Nickel	cinque centesimi
\$2.36	2.36 dollari
Realtor	Agenzia immobiliare
Treasure Island Louis Stevenson Jim Hawkins Israel Hand Long John Silver	L'isola del Tesoro Louis Stevenson Jim Hawkins Israel Hand Long John Silver
Prince Caspian	Il Principe Caspian
The Lord of the Rings The Hobbit	Il signore degli anelli Lo Hobbit
<i>Star Wars</i>	Star Wars
<i>How Dickensian!</i>	<i>Come in Oliver Twist!</i>
Sesame Street	I Muppet

Translation may be considered a type of cultural mediation where the translator acts as the intermediary between different cultures. According to Lathey:

Cultural mediation is hardly necessary [...] when young readers are already familiar with a book's country of origin because of close economic or cultural ties. [...] because of the global domination of the English language, young readers will recognize culture-specific items from songs, films and TV series readily available via the internet or television. (Lathey 2016:37)

An example of “recognizable” culture specific items is “Thanksgiving”, an American national holiday celebrated in the United States on the fourth Thursday in November, which is well-known all around the world mainly through videos, movies and series. In Italian it is translated with “festa del ringraziamento”, which is the term I used in my translation.

As concerns references to real life historical people, some of them could sound familiar to target readers such as Michael Jordan, spelt as *Mike L. Jordan* by Oliver's friend Jimmy to add signatures to a petition with “anonymous” names: to respect the wordplay I spelled the name according to the Italian pronunciation, *Maikol Jordan*. Rockie Balboa may also be familiar being often broadcast on Italian channels; as a consequence, I left the reference untranslated. However, there are names which would not sound familiar to target readers such as Magic Johnson and Captain Kidd; luckily, there are parts of the source text which specify who they are and I merely replaced “captain” with “capitano” and literally translated the other elements.

Both Michael Jordan and Magic Johnson are basketball players: in the original text there are numerous references to the basketball game as Oliver and his friend Jimmy are members of a basketball team. Although this sport is more frequently played than baseball in Italy, it is far more popular in the United States: it is sufficient to think about all the movies or series' scenes where adults or youngsters play basketball in courts on the streets or in parks, about the well-known NBA which is the major professional basketball league in the world¹⁸ and about streetball, a version of basketball played outside, especially in urban areas, which has been created in the United States and is becoming more and more known internationally. Jimmy reminds Oliver of their “ETA for basketball games on

¹⁸ according to usa.usembassy.de

Sunday”; searching through numerous sites, ETA seems to refer to an association which gives special training to basketball athletes, both to professionals and non-professionals, and even organizes summer camps. As I did not find an Italian equivalent of a project similar to this one, which could sound familiar to the target readers, I decided to generalize the reference with “allenamento”, approximating the concept of the source text and applying a translating technique of simplification (Baker 2001: 188).

ST-EN	TT-IT
Magic Jay, Jimmy L’s secret agent name, was rified from <u>his favorite basketball player</u> , the legendary Magic Johnson	Il nome in codice di Jimmy riprendeva quello del <u>suo giocatore di basket preferito</u> , Magic Johnson
Captain Kidd was taken from <u>the notorious pirate</u>	“Capitano Kidd”, invece, si ispirava al <u>ben noto pirata</u>

In the passage *her teacher showed them different cartoons of Rube Goldberg machines*, there is only “cartoon” which could be useful to explain who is Rube Goldberg; thus, in the target text I left the reference to this cartoonist, which cannot be omitted because it introduces a long passage which describes one of the machines, and I added some informative elements: *l’insegnante aveva mostrato alla classe i complicati meccanismi disegnati dal fumettista Rube Golberg*.

The Vanderbeekers live in Harlem, a district of New York City which is famous for being an important pole for international music and art. During the 1920s it was the center of an intellectual, social and artistic dynamism known as the “Harlem Renaissance” (Amick, 2009: 18), which also gave birth to Lindy hop, a dance which belongs to the swing dance family but has its roots in other well-known dances such as jazz, tap and Charleston. In the book everyone seems to love jazz: Mama and Papa, Miss Josie and Mr. Jeet, Mr. Beiderman and even Laney who proudly announces that she adores jazz music. I literally rendered the reference to *jazz music* but I generalized the one to *lindy hop* with *swing* which could sound familiar at least to the target readers’ parents. Parents are important in the reading experience of children; not just because they are the ones who actually buy or borrow a book but because they are likely to be the first “dictionary” the readers consult. Choosing a record to give to Mr. Beiderman, Laney and Oliver find one

by Duke Ellington, a very popular American jazz composer and pianist. I did not omit the referent or added more details to the target text because in the source text there are enough elements to help the target reader understand who the man is: the children are looking for a jazz record and they find one with the image of a man, named Duke Ellington, playing the piano. The last reference to real life historical people is that of a man who dresses like a rapper (baggy pants, oversized jacket and headphones), greets the children with a *Yo!* and is called Big Zee, after the actual rapper, or the successful Jay-Z. The singers may be more or less familiar to Italian children but the target text may offer some elements which give them some hints. Furthermore, the information can be easily found on the internet.

The referents which I completely “manipulated” are those referring to the school system and the currency system. Italian and American educational systems deeply differ: for example, in the source text there are numerous references to “first grade”, “seventh grade”, “eight grade” and an “eighth grade dance” or “prom” which, if translated literally, may result unfamiliar to target readers. On the whole, I omitted the reference to the class grade to avoid replacing it with the Italian “(scuola) media” and I shifted the focus on the age of the characters and whether or not they attend the “last year”, so to be able to go to the dance (only eight graders can attend eight grade dance).

ST-EN	TT-IT
They had a son, Benny, <u>an eight-grader</u> at the twins’ middle school and a close friend of Isa’s	Avevano un figlio, Benny, <u>un ragazzino di tredici anni</u> che frequentava la stessa scuola delle gemelle ed era molto amico di Isa

As concerns coins, it was not easy to decide how much to manipulate the references: finally, I translated \$2.36 with *2.36 dollari*, I left *penny* untranslated, in order to keep the musicality of the writing *Take a penny, leave a penny* > *Prendi un penny, lascia un penny* (resisting the temptation to replace it with “un centesimo”) on a little cup in the Castleman’s Bakery, and substituted *nickel* with its value, *cinque centesimi*, considering “nichelino” sounding too cryptic to the target readers.

“Authors naturally make conscious or unconscious reference to other books in their own (or sometimes other) language” (Lathey 2016: 50). In dealing with intertextual references, translators may decide to leave them, adding some explanations or further details in footnotes if necessary, to omit them, to find an equivalent in the target literary tradition, to compensate the loss with the introduction of a familiar reference in another point of the story or to translate them literally even if there is no equivalent (Lathey 2016: 50). In *The Vanderbeekers* there are numerous references to some of the classics of English children’s literature. Oliver is a bookworm and a poet: he writes haiku, short poems of three phrases coming from the Japanese culture, and he reads all the books his uncle gives him, especially interested in those which involve adventure and piracy. At the beginning of the story he reads *The Treasure Island* by R. L. Stevenson and, then, he begins *Prince Caspian* by C. S. Lewis; both writers may be known to the Italian readers thanks to literature manuals, movie adaptations and different literary versions rewritten according to the age of the assumed readers. Thus, I preserved both references adapting them to the target language (*The Treasure Island* > *L’isola del tesoro*; *Prince Caspian* > *Il principe Caspian*), reading some of the versions destined for Italian children in order to look for the way in which some elements, such as names, are usually translated. As a consequence, I preserved the original forms of the personal names: Jim Hawkins, Israel Hand, Long John Silver. Oliver’s uncle, Arthur, makes also another literary reference: talking about eating just water and bread he exclaims *How Dickensian!* with reference to *Oliver Twist*, one of Dicken’s most renowned novels which could be also familiar to Italian young readers, as the translations published by Oscar Junior classici and Deagostini classici may suggest. However, I chose to make the reference explicit translating the exclamation with *Come in Oliver Twist!* who is known to be a poor boy. In the source text there are also references to movies which have had international success: *Star Wars*, *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Hobbit*: as previously explained, I left untranslated the first one while I substituted the second and third ones with their Italian correspondents.

The last reference I will mention in the present analysis is *Sesame Street*, which refers to an American educational television series for children where puppets and real people interact. Even though I found the Italian correspondent “Sesamo apriti”, I substituted the reference with one more familiar to the Italian readers, especially thanks to movie

adaptations by Disney company, but still linked to the American series: the *Muppets*, puppets who are actually present in the *Sesame Street* episodes.

Geographical References

ST – EN	TT – IT
Harlem	Harlem
Ottenville	Ottenville
New York	New York
Bronx	Bronx
Westchester	Westchester
A to Z Deli	Deli A-Z
Castleman’s Bakery	Il forno dei Castleman
Harlem Café	Harlem Café
Carnegie Hall	Carnegie Hall
New York City College	City College di New York
Goethals Hall	Il Goethals
PS 737’s school cafeteria	bar della scuola

Translation is an act of negotiation. However, the negotiation is not merely between two different linguistic and cultural systems but also between the translating choices made by translators and the assumed receivers of the target text: if translators decide to keep references such as geographical ones, which can be challenging especially because of children’s background experience, they need to give something “in exchange”, such as details which could help young readers at least to recognize the nature of the reference, without excessively lengthening the narrative rhythm.

In *The Vanderbeekers* most of toponyms are not familiar to the target audience but they are not too difficult to read and pronounce and, even if wrongly spelled, this would be not particularly relevant for the understanding of the story; thus, I left them

untranslated only adding some explanation if necessary. New York (City), for example, is often mentioned by media or in movies and TV series, and does not need to be clarified. Harlem, the setting of the story, is shown on the map on the inside cover of the book but it could be less familiar to foreign readers so I have specified that it is a neighbor of New York City (*The Vanderbeeker kids glanced around at their home, a brownstone in Harlem, New York City > Prima di rispondere, i bambini si guardarono intorno osservando la casa, che si trovava all'interno di una palazzina nel quartiere di New York chiamato Harlem*). I adopted the same strategy for the Bronx and Westchester (*Auntie Harrigan and Uncle Arthur, who lived in Westchester > la zia Harrigan e lo zio Arthur [che] vivevano più a nord, nella zona di Westchester*). The last toponym is Ottenville, which may refer to Tottenville, a neighborhood on the South Shore of Staten Island (New York city), where the children's grandparents live: I left the term untranslated and further explanation has not been necessary thanks to some details mentioned in other passages of the source text (ex. *Ottenville? That's, like, four hours away. By car*).

As concerns buildings and shops, I left “Harlem Coffee”, “City College” and “Carnegie Hall” untranslated, although I added a parenthetical element to the second and third ones to better contextualize them.

ST-EN	TT-IT
a series of castle-like structures that made up the City College of New York's Harlem <u>campus</u>	una serie di edifici simili a castelli che componevano il distaccamento di Harlem del City College di New York, <u>uno dei college più importanti della città</u> ;
her impeccable posture making her look stage-ready for Carnegie Hall	con la sua postura perfetta sembrava pronta a <u>esibirsi</u> al Carnegie Hall, <u>teatro di fama mondiale</u>

I slightly adapted *A to Z Deli* into *bazar Deli A-Z*, resisting the temptation to translate it with *Tutto Deli* which could sound more familiar to the target reader but would lose the “exotic” nuance with the element “tutto”. As concerns *The Castleman's Bakery*, I generalized it with *il forno dei Castleman* losing the reference to the writing on the sign.

ST-EN	TT-IT
they smelled the delicious, butter sweet bread smells from <u>Castleman’s Bakery</u> before they saw the storefront	iniziarono a sentire il profumino delizioso delle prelibatezze del <u>forno dei Castleman</u> ancor prima di riuscire a vedere il negozio

Finally, I transformed Goethals Hall (the art history department of Harlem City College) into *il Goethal* and *PS 737’s school cafeteria* into *il bar della scuola*. Goethals Hall is a part of Harlem campus named after George Washington Goethals, the chief engineer of the Panama Canal. I could neither kept the reference nor explaining it with a footnote; thus, I merely omitted the “-s” to “conform” it with the Italian singular article “il”. However, as “il Goethal” could sound as something “impressive”, I managed to keep the reference to the fact that Laney mistakes it for a giant castle. New York’s public schools can be named with numbers (PS 737); to keep this cultural marker I could use a footnote but I chose to omit the referent.

Editors and translators have often made changes to translated texts, fearing that children may be alienated by “difficult” names, new foods or unfamiliar cultural practices (Lathey 2016: 37). Lathey’s reference to “alienation” could be intentional: the verb “to alienate” comes from the Latin: *alius* (“other”) > *alienus* (“of another”) > *alienare* > *alienat-* (“estranged”) > to alienate. According to the Oxford English Dictionary definition, it means “to make somebody feel that they do not belong in a particular group”, that is to say “to exclude”. “Alieno” is something distant, different, weird and sometimes even something to be afraid of. However, “everything is foreign or new for a young child, and it seems probable that children do not make cultural distinctions but just accept what attracts them” (Pauolo 2010: 52). Taking something at distance, because labelled as “different” and “other”, may only result in preventing ourselves from really knowing it; thus, we exclude to be excluded. Similarly, children are excluded when they are prevented from knowing something just for fear that they might not understand, something that maybe could actually make them feel more interested than shocked.

Preserving in the translated text culturally specific givens – those of food and drink, for example – goes back to the idea of child’s capacity to absorb stimuli, coming from another culture, thanks to which they can later widen their awareness of the world. (Klingberg 1986 in Paruolo 2010: 52)

Books may help children to open themselves up to alternatives, to feel included in a world which is more and more globalized and “social”. They can work as bridges which promote cross-cultural communication representing boundaries which do not mark a line not to overcome, but symbolise where the contact between “differences” needs to be established.

4.4 First Names

«Errore! I nomi sono importanti!» protestò Bruco. «Se un giorno desiderassi far visita al signore gentile che vive in quella casetta, come potrei trovarlo se non conosco il suo nome.» (Gnone 2015: 33)

Whereas characters’ names are rarely changed in the translation of adult fiction translators writing for children often adapt them, for example by using equivalent in the target language such as Hans/John/Jean, Willian/Guillermo/Guillaume, Alice/Alicia. This is a contentious issue, however, since names are a powerful signal of social and cultural context. (Lathey 2016:4)

Anthroponyms are some of the most challenging elements to translate, especially in children’s literature. They can be descriptive or non-descriptive but never non-informative as they always tell details about the individuals they identify, such as gender, age and geographical origin. In some cases, they can refer to real-life historical people but, in most cases, they refer to fictitious characters and arise from the author’s creativity. Furthermore, they can hide a double sense which may be relevant to understand characters and their choices during the story, they can be onomatopoeic and evocative. Occasionally, all these features may be blended together; a good example of this may be the names created by Elisabetta Gnone, a popular Italian writer for children who has written the successful Fairy Oak series, whose characters have surprisingly creative and catchy names: Vaniglia and Pervinca Periwinkle, Lalla Tomellilla, Ginestrella Gill, Flox Pollimon, Shirley Poppy and Scarlet Pimpernel. Not to mention those invented by one of the most worldwide acclaimed children’s writers, Roald Dahl: Miss Trunchbull, Willy Wonka, Augustus Gloop, and the Oompa-Loompas. Although being a little less creative

and playful, names such as Elisha, Leo Blue, Sim Lolness and Neil Amen, created by another well-known author for children, the French Timotée de la Fombelle, who has written the awarded saga of Tobie Lolness, clearly demonstrate that the choosing of personal names is always crucial and intentional.

Translators' choices about *if* and *how* to render characters' names must be as crucial and intentional, despite the numerous, clear and specific instructions they are likely to receive by editors and publishers. On the whole, there is not a set of "official" rules ready to be consulted in translating characters' names except for the age and the assumed background knowledge of the target readers. Translators are also guided by their own child image: names may be "foreignized" to encourage identification, or "adapted" to sound "familiar" and take the "Other" at distance (Nord 2003 :184). Thus, they may be left untranslated, transformed from a morphological point of view, replaced by completely different references in the target language or being slightly changed in their orthography and phonetics to be easier to pronounce.

In her book *Lucchetti babbani e medaglioni magici*, Katerinov (2007) examines in depth the translation strategies which have been employed to render the personal names of the Harry Potter saga in Italian. Discussing some of the strategies aforementioned, she also investigates what she calls "soluzione intermedia" (Katerinov 2007 :26), an "intermediary solution", used by the translators, which refers to the substitution of an original name, difficult both to pronounce and to remember for the target reader, with a name which still sounds "exotic" and preserve the "atmosphere" of the source culture but which could be "accommodated" according to the readers' background knowledge. By way of illustration, she mentions the case of *Terry Boot* > *Terry Steeval*: the translation still sounds English but its pronunciation can actually make the reader think about the type of footwear ("stivale" in Italian) preserving the "meaning" of the original term (Katerinov 2007: 47). Katerinov defines this kind of solution as very "ingenious" but she questions whether it could be really necessary in cases similar to the one of Terry, whose surname is not actually "parlante" that is to say that it does not include connotations which give further details on the character involved. However, the inventiveness of this "intermediary solution" cannot be denied, as it may actually suggest an effective alternative approach which may permit translators both to keep the atmosphere of the source cultural and linguistic system and meet the target readers' needs without being

forced to choose between completely domesticate a referent or left it untranslated, risking to compromise the communication act.

In the following paragraphs I will present the analysis of the translating strategies I adopted to render *The Vanderbeekers'* characters' names, referring to both people and animals. They are not linguistically and semantically creative as the examples given at the beginning of the present section, though the challenge has been tough especially when I had to handle recurring names not easy to read or pronounce (Hyacinth) or linked to wordplays and nicknames (Laney, Laney-Panda, Laney-Bean; Beiderman, Beezerman, Beetleman). In those cases, I was inspired by the “intermediary solution” mentioned by Katerinov. Alternatively, I tried to leave the names untranslated, merely adapting the honorifics if necessary, in the attempt to be coherent with the translating method I discuss in the first section of the present chapter focused on cultural markers: preserving as many source cultural elements as possible, inviting target readers to widen their horizons and approach the “difference” as something more familiar than scary. It cannot be denied that names have a social, cultural and legal significance and although they have been englobed in a more international perspective, they belong to the historical and social assets of a specific culture. However, I must admit that I was helped in my attempt to preserve all the cultural markers by the fact that, thanks to the revolution of the internet, transport and other means of communication, our societies are becoming more and more multicultural and international.

As stated by Aguilera: “thanks to television, children in most parts of the world know certain cultures quite well, the so-called dominant cultures which coincide with the Anglo-Saxon ones” (Aguilera 2008: cap. 3.1). Thus, before diving into the translation of the book's proper names I tried to understand better the potential English level of my target readers, children from 7 to 11, capable of reading and writing: I checked some of the English textbooks used for the primary school, as well as movies and cartoons created in Anglophone countries. On the whole, Italian children are familiar with names “sounding different”: in *The Secret Life of Pets*, an animated comedy released in 2016, there are names such as “Max”, “Gidget”, “Duke”, “Buddy” (the translated ones are only those which hide a double sense: “Snowball” > “Nevosetto”, “Sweet Pea” > “Pisellino”); in *Hotel Transylvania*, an animated comedy released in 2012 with a sequel in 2015, there are names such as “Wayne”, “Mavis”, “Murray”, “Griffin”; while the successful Peppa

Pig episodes have already accustomed the young readers to names like “George”, “Richard Coniglio” and “Danny cane”. Moreover, the assumed readers seem slightly familiar with the fact that letters may not always be read as written but may change pronunciation according to the contextual elements of the word: English textbooks by Pearson and Giunti Junior include activities focused on the pronunciation and glossary to check the spelling and the meaning. These books also offer stories and activities which show characters named Peter, Betty, Jason, etc. Therefore, all the examples given may suggest that translators should not be excessively afraid to leave names untranslated, especially when not too difficult to pronounce or hiding a double sense, which do not need to be adapted to be fully appreciated by target readers. To help me structure the analysis, I divide the personal names in three groups - primary characters, secondary characters and background characters – which I include in three tables.

PRIMARY CHARACTERS – The Vanderbecker Family and Mr. Beiderman

ST – EN	TT – IT
Isa (12)	Isa
Izzy	Izzy (Elsa)
Jessie (12)	Jessie
Oliver (9)	Oliver
Ollie	Ollie
Hyacinth (6)	Viola
Laney (4)	Sophie
Laney Panda	Sophie Panda
Laney-Bean	Sofficino
Mama	Mamma
Papa	Papa
Paganini (bunny)	Paganini
Franz (dog)	Franz
George Washington (cat)	George Washington
Mr. Beiderman	Signor Beiderman

Beetleman Beezerman	Doberman Bizzeman
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The five Vanderbecker children are the real “heroes” of the story; thus, their names need to be easy to pronounce and remember for the readers. I left untranslated the names of Oliver, Jessie and Isa. Oliver has Norman origins and is widely used in Anglophones countries; however, according to Istat (Italian National Institute of Statistics) figures show that in recent years it is more and more frequently chosen in Italy. Similarly, I also left untranslated “Ollie”, the way in which his little sister Laney calls him. Jessie may be not too difficult to pronounce and may sound as the short form for “Gessica”; I was uncertain if avoiding the final “e” but I concluded that its presence would not compromise the pronunciation. Isa is quite an easy name to identify being similar to the short name for “Isabella”, which is very popular in Italian, as it is in North America. Moreover, the different pronunciation of the initial “I” would not pose a problem because there are no wordplays or games linked to the name. She is called “Izzy” by a very unfriendly and haughty boy and although being uncertain if changing it with “Elsa”, present in both North American and Italian cultures and familiar to children thanks to the Disney movie “Frozen”, I decided to preserve the original form, which is not too difficult to read and still expresses the mocking purpose of the speaker.

Hyacinth and Laney have undergone radical transformation. Hyacinth is not easy to read and pronounce. Moreover, if translated with the Italian correspondent it would have been “Giacinta” which is not frequently used nowadays and mostly in the male form (“Giacinto”). Therefore, inspired by the “intermediary solution” mentioned above, I looked for a name which refers to a flower and could also be employed in Anglophone countries: Viola, shown by statistics as being more frequent than the similar name “Violet”. As regards Laney, it was not the “readability” that influenced my decision to turn the name into “Sophie” but the fact that she dresses up to become Laney-Panda, she is called Laney-Bean by her father and she is accused by her brother of “spilling the beans”, an idiomatic expression which curiously recalls the “bean” of the nickname. Sophie is a name which sounds English and may be linked by Italian children to “Sofia”,

“Sofi”. Moreover, its sound still gives the idea of a little child and even allowed me to keep the related expressions mentioned above: *Laney-Panda* > *Sophie-Panda*, *Laney-Bean* > *Sofficino*, *spill the beans* > *fare una soffiata*.

“Mama” and “Papa” are forms which children may use to refer to their parents; in the OED they are defined as old-fashioned and belonging to an informal register. The linguist Roman Jakobson defines them as “intimate, emotional, childishly tinged words” (Jakobson 1971 :22), which differ in use from more general and abstract terms like the higher “mother and father” and originate from nursery forms which are at the basis of the linguistic similarities between the ways in which children refer to their parents in different countries. In the target text I chose to standardize them with “mamma” e “papà” avoiding “mammina”, “papino”, “mami”, “papi”, which could actually sound more informal and “childish” but a bit bizarre if continually repeated and even used by the narrating voice.

The Vanderbeekers have three pets named after real historical people: the cat George Washington is named after the first president of the United States, the dog Franz is likely to be named after Franz Boas, a German-born American anthropologist and the rabbit Paganini is named after the Italian violinist and composer. I left all the names untranslated: the first one could pose some problems to the target readers, who could ask a parent, a teacher or an older sibling for help; the second one may not be recognized from a referential point of view but it is not too difficult to read and sounds fairly familiar in Italy, where it may recall the husband of the famous Princess Sissie; the third one is a well-known Italian person with whom some children may not be acquainted but it may be sufficient to ask an adult (or search on the internet).

The last main character is Mr. Beiderman, the “evil” landlord of the family’s house who does not renew their lease. The children often play with his name calling him the “Beetleman” and the “Beezerman”, nicknames which I managed to render in the target text, slightly changing them but still making them sound as “foreign” with the *-man* suffix, which may be familiar to children thanks to the names of superheroes such as “Spiderman”, “Superman” and “Batman”. I translated *Beetleman* with *Doberman* keeping the reference to an animal though changing the idea from “dirty and revolting” to “scary and aggressive”. As regards *Beezerman*, I kept the alliterative sound of “Beezer”, likely to be a funny variation of “geezer” which is an informal term to refer to

an old man considered a bit strange, using the term “Bizze” which in Italian means a complaint for something without a real reason: the old man is accused by Jessie of forcing them to move without even knowing them, thus he may become *il Bizzeman*.

SECONDARY CHARACTERS

ST – EN	TT – IT
Jimmy L	Jimmy L
Miss Josie	Signora Josie
Mr. Jeet	Signor Jeet
Uncle Arthur	Zio Arthur
Auntie Harrigan	Zia Harrigan
Mr. Jones	Signor Jones
Mr. Van Hooten	Signor Van Hooten
Ms. Castleman	Signora Castleman
Mr. Castleman	Signor Castleman
Benny	Benny
Benjamin	Benjamin
Mr. Smiley	Signor Smiley
Angie	Angie
Allegra	Allegra

In 141st street the Vanderbecker children know “everyone on the block by name, age, and hairstyle” (Glaser, 2017: 9). They have many friends and some of them are present in various scenes of the story, as well as in the sequel books, such as Miss. Josie, Mr. Jeet, Benny, Uncle Arthur and Jimmy L. On the whole I left their names untranslated merely adapting the honorifics to the Italian system: “Mr.” > “signore”, “Ms. > signora”, “Uncle > zio”, “Aunt > zia”. As regards Miss Jossie, I rendered “Miss” as “signora” as the old woman lives with Mr. Jeet, who is said to be her husband; according to OED the honorific “miss” may be also used by children as a form to address a woman, regardless of whether she is married or not.

Jimmy L is a friend of Oliver’s. I left his name untranslated because like Benny and Angie it may be not extremely difficult to read and pronounce; however, I was uncertain whether or not to leave the “L” referring probably to his middle name. According to journalist Merrill Fabry by The Times, “the assumption that people will have a middle name is fairly common”¹⁹ and seems to be spread internationally in the 19th century to symbolise especially a social allegiance or a godparent relationship. In United States, it is often signalled by an initial after the name and before the surname, and Jimmy L is likely to be an example of this. Finally, I chose to preserve the initial because it does not prevent the understanding of the story and may be not too bizarre for Italian children who could become acquainted with a different naming custom or just interpret it as a way used by Jimmy’s friends to distinguish him from another potential “Jimmy” they know.

BACKGROUND CHARACTERS

ST – EN	TT – IT
Luciana Beiderman	Lusiana Beiderman
Abigail Beiderman	Abigail Beiderman
Ms. Mitchell	Signora Mitchell
Señor Paz	Señor Paz
Snuggles	Poncho
Mark	Mark
Professor Mendoza	Maestro Mendoza
Professor Suarez	Docenti
Carlson	Carlson
Big Zee (singer)	Big Zee
Mr. Richie	Signor Richie
Mr. Johnson	Signor Johnson
Miss Walker	Signorina Walker
Mr. Voulos	Signor Voulos

¹⁹ <https://time.com/4451977/history-of-middle-names/>

Mr. Nelson	Signor Nelson
Freddy	Freddy
Jefferson Jamison	Jefferson Jamison
Charlotte	Charlotte
Joseph	Joseph
Austin Rochester	Austin Rochester
Francesca Priscilla Arlington (cat)	Francesca Priscilla Arlington

As concerns the background characters, I generally left their names untranslated and adapted the honorifics to the Italian system. However, I would like to discuss four examples which may be interesting to include in the present translation analysis: Luciana, Señor Paz, Poncho and Professor Suarez. Luciana is the daughter of Mr. Beiderman; she is a very talented violinist and she dies very young in a car accident. “Luciana” is a name of Italian and Spanish origin meaning “light”, frequently used in Latin American; as there are many references to the Spanish language in the text I substituted “c” with “s” to preserve the pronunciation (“Luciana” > “Lusiana”). Another reason for this translating choice is that the girl represents a very fascinating and mysterious figure for the Vanderbecker children, especially for Isa who shares with her a passion for music, and her “exotic” name actually seems to increase this sense of “exotic”, “distant”, “not well known”. Eventually, I chose not to use the Italian equivalent “Luciana” which is not frequently used in Italian nowadays and made me think of an old lady.

Snuggle and Señor Paz are two dogs who leave near the Vanderbeekers house and are mentioned only one time in one of the first chapters of the story. As regards Señor Paz, I chose to keep the Spanish reference of the “Señor” and “Paz” (meaning “peace” in Spanish) which I think may be not too obscure for Italian young readers. By contrast, I changed “Snuggles” to “Poncho” as the name of the pet is used in a wordplay linked to the meaning of the verb “to snuggle”: to get into, or to put somebody/something into, a warm comfortable position, especially close to somebody (OED).

ST-EN	TT-IT
<p>“I thought <u>Snuggles</u> had gone to heaven when he tasted the other dog cookie you made.” Thinking about <u>Snuggles</u> made Hyacinth think about her blanket (also named <u>Snuggles</u>).</p>	<p><u>Poncho ha toccato il cielo con un dito l’ultima volta che ha assaggiato un vostro biscotto.»</u> Pensando a Poncho, a Viola vennero in mente la sua coperta (calda come un poncho).</p>

In order to keep the wordplay, I substituted the name of the dog with “Poncho” to preserve the idea of something used to stay warmed and to avoid omitting too many elements from the source text: I only changed the sentence in brackets keeping the explanatory function it has in the source text. Lastly, in the case of professor Suarez, I did not translate “professor” with what may be considered its Italian equivalent, “professore”, because it may also refer to a female professor, a “professoressa”. The character is mentioned only once and has little relevance in the story; thus, there are no other elements which could be useful in the interpreting process. “Docente” may be another equivalent, referring both to males and females in Italian, but the choice between the article “la” or “il” cannot be avoided. Thus, I changed the number of the reference which becomes plural in the target text, “docenti”, potentially referring to professors of both sexes.

Writing for children does not necessarily imply the oversimplification of stylistic and semantic features: readers need to be challenged with some difficulties, to have the right to find their own way to solve a “problem” and to interpret items according their own subjectivity. It may be interesting to borrow some terms from new approaches to teaching and learning strategies and apply them to a discussion about translating for young readers: supposing a translator as a “facilitator”, he/she may be seen as someone who does not need to simplify the reading experience of his/her readers, but promotes it creating an “environment” whose obstacles may be posed to arouse and stimulate young readers’ cognitive qualities without turning into “barriers” which may completely prevent communication.

The receptor lacks of understanding does not allow the fulfilment of the communicative function of the text initiated by the author, as it alienated the new addressee, leaving him/her out of the communicative process. Thus, [...] in this case the translator stops being a bridge between two languages and cultures, minimizing his/her mediator function. (Cámara-Aguilera 2008: cap.3.2)

CONCLUSION

Little Women, an elemental guidebook for the evolution of consciousness and the value of conscience. A chronicle of four unforgettable girls, each offering something of their own [...] Louisa May Alcott infused life, laughter, and unremittent hope and determination to the March girls and, thus, to the little women of her time, and time to come. (Patty Smith in Alcott 2018: x)

“Offering” is a verb which Patti Smith adopts when referring to the characters of a novel; however, it might be associated with any literary product. All books are likely to be an invitation, an offering to readers who are encouraged to open themselves the chance of a different perspective, an alternative story. Although sometimes they have the dangerous power to create “a single story, show people as one thing, as only one thing, over and over again, and that is what they become²⁰”, reinforcing shared stereotypes, they can actually present the same single story as a tiny ring of an endless chain of numberless tiny single stories, each connected one to the other. Discussing the danger of a single story, the Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adiche states:

How impressionable and vulnerable we are in the face of a story, particularly as children. [...] I loved those American and British books I read. They stirred my imagination. They opened up new worlds for me. But the unintended consequence was that I did not know that people like me could exist in literature. So what the discovery of African writers did for me was this: It saved me from having a single story of what books are.²¹

Freedom is an issue which should always be linked with reading. Readers need to be granted the freedom of interpretation: they need to create their own meanings, to choose whether to learn something from a book, to be entertained by it or, hopefully, to implicitly learn something while enjoying completely new situations and concepts. Interpretation is a right of all readers; as a consequence, all translators, who are the first readers of a book written in a foreign language, have the same right. Thus, while reading, they interpret the story and their translation is necessarily based on this interpretation, despite their possible attempt to be as “faithful” as possible to the original text and author. Translation is an interpretation as “the function of the text is not ‘as such’ but is redefined every time the text is read” (Oittinen 2000: 12)

²⁰ Chimamanda Ngozi Adiche, TedGlobal 2009

²¹ Chimamanda Ngozi Adiche, TedGlobal 2009

The translating process lies at the core of the present dissertation, whose structure was intended to trace the path I followed first as a reader and then as a novice translator, who needed to focus on all the multifaceted aspects of a text. *The Vanderbecker of 141st street* is actually crowded with interesting elements which I analysed talking about themes, extremely relevant for today's societies such as community, family, sisterhood and empathy, and retracing all the translating strategies I adopted working on the Italian target text. I started from the background: theory is always useful to find peculiarities, interesting issues to focus on, and to analyze and research some features in greater detail. I needed to know more about the forces which are involved in a translating process: for example, I needed to know better my assumed readers. In order to do so, I challenged first of all myself, as a student, as a reader, as a translator and, above all, as a young woman who was once a child and who has been always trying not to forget this while growing up. Thus, I discovered that I do not believe children to be "pure" and naïve beings, uncorrupted and so not to be corrupted. They are so open to the world around them that sometimes it escapes the adults' attention how much they know or they have assimilated. They are not faultless, weak and unprepared to deal with "all the harshest aspects of life" (Babbitt 1973 cited in Hunt: 24): from war to cruelty, from disability to poverty, from death to abuse. I have always read books for children or adolescents, but reading them with a translating interest has led me to look for everything that could signal richness, both in form and in content. Maybe not too surprisingly, I found many elements to underline, from gender to wordplay.

What this project has helped me to do is to raise my awareness of what it means to be a translator, "whose craft and art requires the talents of an accomplished writer and a fingertip appreciation of the range of nuances in at least two languages" (Lathey 2010: Introduction). I gave sense, my sense, to a project which could have simply be undertaken as a mere *assemblage* of equivalent structures and words in the target stylistic and linguistic system, but which actually means being caught up in a whirling vortex of destabilizing dynamism, creative experimentation and complex interaction. I feel that I have experienced myself what Oittinen says when talking about the profile of a translator for children: translators bring to the translation their cultural heritage, their reading experience, the image of childhood and their own image of the child (Oittinen 2000: 5).

I would like to define the present dissertation as a personal interpretation of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943²²), a pyramid which outlines the needs at the basis of people's motivation for acting in the world, in a hierarchical order. These needs might be divided in three main groups: primary needs, secondary needs and self-realization. My primary need was theory which granted me tools to work with, as guidelines on the assumed readers' responses or expectations, and on general specific features and critics regarding children's literature. My secondary need was getting into the text, which I had chosen to work with, and I did it through the analysis of its thematic and stylistic features. As concerns self-realization, I needed to be self-aware of the direction of my *motus*: my motivational tension, the sense of what I was doing. What I discovered was that I was not merely unravelling the richness and complexity of a book destined for a young audience, too often unexpected, or the actual challenges a translator needs to face, but I was looking for my conscious, active and voluntary participation in the process, that is to say my "role". I was not just looking from the outside as I often do when I approach new subjects or materials; I was inside the project and I could see my direct and personal involvement, in a clearest way. Thus, what I hope to have achieved is not only self-realization but self-actualization.

Any form of translational action, including translation itself, might be conceived as an action, as the name implies an action leads to a result, a new situation or event, and possibly to a "new" object. (Vermeer 1989 in Oittinen 2000: 11)

This "action" does not mean just being proud of translating strategies such as rendering "Hyacinth" as "Viola", so as to keep the reference to the flower and to a name which could actually be used in the North American context or to render "Beetleman" as "Doberman", in order to keep the wordplay, but to offer readers the chance to enjoy those elements. This means giving voice not only to the original author and text but also to readers, especially when belonging to different cultures and societies. Although it might sound like a paradox, the scope of translating a book, full of given details, situations, characters and themes, needs to give voice to its readers, their emotions, likes or dislikes,

²² <https://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html>

offering an interpretation far from being dogmatic but open to criticism or further semantic “manipulation”.

I would like to conclude my dissertation with two scenes taken from *Matilda* by Roald Dahl, a novel which was a faithful friend during my childhood, which has been a valuable guide through this project and which I will always store as a dearest treasure.

‘Mr Hemingway says a lot of things I don’t understand,’ Matilda said to her. ‘Especially about men and women. But I loved it all the same. The way he tells it I feel I am right there on the spot watching it all happen.’ A fine writer will always make you feel that,’ Mrs Phelps said. ‘And don’t worry about the bits you can’t understand. Sit back and allow the words to wash around you, like music.’ ‘I will, I will.’ (Dahl 2007: 13)

‘Do you think that all children’s books ought to have funny bits in them?’ Miss Honey asked. ‘I do,’ Matilda said. ‘Children are not so serious as grown-ups and they love to laugh.’ Miss Honey was astounded by the wisdom of this tiny girl. [...] ‘I am very fond of Charles Dickens,’ Matilda said. ‘He makes me laugh a lot. Especially Mr. Pickwick.’ (Dahl 2007: 75)

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APPENDIX 1: ST-TT

<p style="text-align: center;">THE VENDERBEEKERS Of 141st street</p> <p style="text-align: center;">FRIDAY, DECEMBER 20</p> <p style="text-align: center;">One</p> <p>In the middle of a quiet block on 141st Street, inside a brownstone made of deep red shale, the Vanderbeeker family gathered in the living room for a family meeting. Their pets – a dog named Franz, a cat name George Washington, and a house rabbit named Paganini – sprawled on the carpet, taking afternoon naps in a strip of sunlight. The pipes rumbled companionably within the brownstone walls.</p> <p>“Do you want the good news or the bad news first?”</p> <p>The five Vanderbeeker kids looked at their parents.</p> <p>“Good news,” said Isa and Laney.</p> <p>“Bad news,” said Jessie, Oliver, and Hyacinth.</p> <p>“Right-o,” said Papa. “Good news first.” He paused and adjusted his glasses. “You kids all know how much Mama and I love you, right?”</p> <p>Oliver, who was nine years old and wise to the ways of the world, put down his book and squinted. “Are you guys getting divorce? Jimmy L’s parent got a divorce. Then they let him get a</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">I VANDERBEEKER Che nessuno si muova!</p> <p style="text-align: center;">VENERDI 20 DICEMBRE</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Uno</p> <p>New York. In una palazzina a mattoni rossi al centro di un tranquillo isolato sulla 141^a strada, tutti i Vanderbeeker si trovavano in salotto per una riunione di famiglia. Non mancavano il cane Franz, il gatto George Washington e il coniglio Paganini, che sonnecchiavano sul tappeto, spaparanzati lungo il fascio di luce che filtrava dalla finestra. Anche le tubature brontolavano la loro presenza dalle pareti dell’edificio.</p> <p>«Volete prima la notizia buona o quella cattiva?»</p> <p>I cinque piccoli Vanderbeeker guardarono i genitori.</p> <p>«Quella buona» risposero Isa e Sofie.</p> <p>«Quella cattiva» risposero Jessie, Oliver e Viola.</p> <p>«Oookay» disse il papà. «Allora prima quella buona.» Fece una pausa e si aggiustò gli occhiali. «Tutti voi sapete quanto io e la mamma vi amiamo, giusto?»</p> <p>Oliver, che a nove anni aveva già capito come</p>
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pet snake.” He kicked the backs of his sneakers against the tall stack of ancient encyclopedias he was sitting on.

“No, we’re –” Papa began.

“Is it true?” six-year-old Hyacinth whispered, tears pooling in her round eyes.

“Of course we’re –” Mama said.

“What’s a dorce?” interrupted Laney, who was four and three-quarters years old and practicing her forward rolls on the carpet. She was wearing an outfit of red plaids, lavender stripes, and aqua polka dots that she matched herself.

“It means Mama and Papa don’t love each other anymore,” said twelve-year-old Jessie, glaring at her parents from behind chunky black eyeglasses. “What a nightmare”.

“We’ll have to split our time between them,” added Isa, Jessie’s twin. She was holding her violin, and jabbed her bow against the arm of the couch. “Alternating holidays and summers and whatnot. I think I’m going to be sick.”

Mama threw up her hands. “STOP! Just ... everyone please. Stop. Papa and I are not getting divorce. Absolutely not. We’re going about this all wrong.”

Mama glanced at Papa, took a deep breath, and briefly closed her eyes. Isa noticed dark circles

girava il mondo, posò il libro che aveva in mano e guardò di sottocchi i genitori. «Non è che state divorziando voi due? I genitori di Jimmy si e gli hanno regalato un serpente da tenere in casa» disse dando un calcio con il retro delle sneakers alla pila di enciclopedie su cui stava seduto.

«No, noi stiamo...» iniziò il papà.

«Allora è vero?» disse a bassa voce Viola, sei anni, mentre gli occhioni tondi le si riempivano di lacrime.

«Ma certo che noi...» disse la mamma.

«Che cos’è un *vorzio*?» la interruppe Sofie, quattro anni e tre quarti, intenta a provare la capriola sul tappeto. Indossava un completo a quadretti rossi, strisce viola lavanda e pois turchesi che aveva abbinato tutta da sola.

«Vuol dire che mamma e papà non si amano più» le spiegò Jessie, dodici anni, fissando i genitori da dietro i suoi spessi occhiali neri.

«Che incubo!»

«Ci toccherà dividere il nostro tempo tra di loro» aggiunse Isa, la gemella di Jessie, conficcando l’arco del violino che teneva in mano nel bracciolo del divano. «E dovremo alternarci per le vacanze, le estati e chissà cos’altro. Mi sento male a pensarci.»

La mamma alzò le mani. «FERMI TUTTI! Un attimo di silenzio, per favore. Io e vostro padre non stiamo divorziando nella maniera più assoluta. Questo discorso ha preso una piega completamente sbagliata». Dopodiché fissò il

<p>under her mom’s eyes that hadn’t been there the week before.</p> <p>Mama’s eyes opened. “Let’s start over. First, answer this question: on a scale of one to ten, how much do you like living here?”</p> <p>The Vanderbeeker kids glanced around at their home, a brownstone in Harlem, New York City. It consisted of the basement; a ground floor with a living room that flowed into an open kitchen, a bathroom, and a laundry room; and a first floor with three bedrooms, a walk-in-closet-turned-bedroom where Oliver lived, and another bathroom, all lined up in a row. A door on the ground floor opened up to a skinny backyard where a mommy cat and her new litter of kittens made their home under a hydrangea bush.</p> <p>The kids considered Mama’s question.</p> <p>“Ten,” Jessie, Isa, Hyacinth, and Laney replied.</p> <p>“A million,” said Oliver, still squinting suspiciously at his parents.</p> <p>“It’s the best place in the world,” reported Laney who somersaulted again and knocked down Isa’s music stand. The pets scattered, except Franz, who didn’t flinch, despite now being covered in sheet music.</p> <p>“We’ve lived here most of our lives,” said Isa. “It’s the perfect home.”</p> <p>“Except the Beiderman, of course,” added Jessie.</p>	<p>papà, fece un respiro profondo e chiuse per un attimo gli occhi. E sotto a questi, Isa notò dei cerchi scuri che la settimana prima non c’erano.</p> <p>«Ricominciamo da capo» disse la mamma riaprendo gli occhi. «Prima di tutto, rispondete a questa domanda: da uno a dieci, quanto vi piace vivere qui?»</p> <p>Prima di rispondere, i bambini si guardarono intorno osservando la casa, che si trovava all’interno di una palazzina nel quartiere di New York chiamato Harlem. Era composta dalla cantina, dal piano terra con salotto e cucina comunicanti e dal primo piano con, in fila una accanto all’altra, tre camere da letto, un’ex cabina armadio, ora camera di Oliver, e un bagno. Dal piano terra, una porta si apriva su uno spoglio giardinetto dove, dietro un cespuglio di ortensie, si era stabilita una mamma gatta con la sua cucciolata.</p> <p>«Dieci!» risposero Jessie, Isa, Viola e Sofie.</p> <p>«Un milione!» aggiunse Oliver continuando a guardare sospettoso verso i genitori.</p> <p>«È il posto più bello del mondo» disse Sofie esibendosi nell’ennesima capriola e andando a sbattere contro il leggìo musicale di Viola. George Washington e Paganini schizzarono via mentre Franz, rimasto immobile, si trovò ricoperto di fogli.</p> <p>«Questa casa è perfetta per noi, viviamo qui praticamente da sempre!» disse Isa.</p> <p>«Senza contare quel Beiderman però» aggiunse Jessie.</p>
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<p>The Beiderman lived on the brownstone's third floor. He was a seriously unpleasant man. He was also their landlord.</p> <p>"Mr. Beiderman," Papa corrected Jessie. "And funny you mentioned him." Papa stood up and started pacing the length of the couch. His face was so grim that his ever-present smile creases disappeared. "I didn't see this coming but he's not renewing our lease."</p> <p>"He's not renewing our —" Jessie started.</p> <p>"What a punk!" shouted Oliver.</p> <p>"What's a lease?" asked Laney.</p> <p>Papa continued as if the kids hadn't spoken. "Now, you have all done a great job the past year respecting Mr. Beiderman and his need for privacy and quiet," he said. "I mean, I thought for sure he would have kicked us out a couple of years ago when Oliver hit that baseball through his window, or when Franz used his front door like a fire hydrant. I'm surprised he's making us leave now, after a spotless record this year." Papa paused and peered at his children.</p> <p>The kids nodded and looked back at him with innocent eyes, all except Oliver, who was hoping no one remembered the little incident early that year when his Frisbee snapped a sprinkler pipe, causing a blast of water to shoot right into the Beiderman's open window.</p>	<p>Il Beiderman viveva al terzo piano della palazzina e oltre ad essere un uomo davvero spiacevole era anche il loro padrone di casa.</p> <p>«Il <i>signor</i> Beiderman» la corresse il papà.</p> <p>«Curioso che tu lo abbia nominato» disse alzandosi e iniziando a camminare su e giù davanti al divano con un'espressione così seria che anche le fossette che gli incorniciavano sempre il viso erano scomparse. «Non me lo sarei mai aspettato ma mi ha appena detto che non ci vuole rinnovare il contratto.»</p> <p>«Non ci vuole rinnovare il...» iniziò Jessie.</p> <p>«Che sfigato!» urlò Oliver.</p> <p>«Che cos'è un <i>contratto</i>?» chiese Sofie.</p> <p>«Sentite» continuò il papà come se non avessero parlato, «avete fatto tutti un ottimo lavoro quest'anno rispettando il signor Beiderman e il suo bisogno di pace e tranquillità. Ero sicuro che ci avrebbe buttato fuori due anni fa quando Oliver gli aveva rotto la finestra con la palla da baseball o quando Franz aveva scambiato la sua porta per un cespuglio. Sono sorpreso che ci faccia andare via adesso, dopo un anno di condotta impeccabile». Fece una pausa e osservò i figli.</p> <p>I bambini annuirono e lo guardarono con occhi innocenti, tutti tranne Oliver che sperava che nessuno si ricordasse di quando il suo frisbee aveva rotto un tubo dell'irrigazione sparando un getto d'acqua potentissimo direttamente verso la finestra aperta del Beiderman.</p>
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<p>Papa did not bring up the sprinkler incident. Instead he said, “We have to move at the end of the month.”</p> <p>The room exploded with indignation.</p> <p>“Are you <i>serious</i>? We’ve been so good, there must as well be halos above our heads!” exclaimed Jessie, her glasses slipping down the bridge of her nose.</p> <p>“I haven’t bounced a basketball in front of the building in months!” Oliver said.</p> <p>“What’s a lease?” Laney asked again.</p> <p>“Isa has to practice violin in the freaking dungeon!” said Jessie.</p> <p>“Language,” Mama warned at the same time Isa said, “I <i>like</i> practicing down there.”</p> <p>Papa looked at Laney. “We have a lease with Mr. Beiderman. It’s an agreement between us for living here.”</p> <p>Laney considered what Papa said as she prepped another somersault. “So that means he doesn’t want us?”</p> <p>“It’s not that ...” Mama trailed off.</p> <p>“I think the Beetleman needs hugs,” Laney decided.</p> <p>She completed an accident-free somersault, then rolled over to lie on her stomach, searching for her bunny, who had taken refuge under the couch.</p> <p>Jessie glanced at the calendar on the wall. “So that’s it? We’ve only got eleven days left here?”</p>	<p>Ma il papà non fece riferimento a quel piccolo incidente. «Dobbiamo andarcene entro la fine del mese» disse.</p> <p>La stanza si riempì di grida di protesta.</p> <p>«Ma <i>davvero</i>? Siamo stati così bravi che potremmo avere delle aureole sopra la testa!» esclamò Jessie mentre gli occhiali le scivolavano giù lungo il naso.</p> <p>«È da mesi che non gioco a basket davanti casa!» aggiunse Oliver.</p> <p>«Cos’è un <i>contratto</i>?» chiese di nuovo Sofie.</p> <p>«Isa deve suonare il violino in quella cavolo di gattabuia!» continuò Jessie.</p> <p>«Moderiamo il linguaggio!» la riprese la mamma mentre Isa precisava: «A me <i>piace</i> suonare là sotto.»</p> <p>«Abbiamo un contratto con il signor Beiderman» spiegò il papà a Sofie. «Si tratta di un accordo che ci permette di vivere qui».</p> <p>Sofie ci pensò un attimo su e si preparò per un’altra capriola. «Quindi vuol dire che non ci vuole?»</p> <p>«Non è proprio così...» provò a spiegare la mamma non sapendo come finire la frase.</p> <p>«Secondo me il Doberman ha bisogno di tanti abbracci!» affermò Sofie prima di completare sana e salva un’altra capriola e rotolare a pancia in giù, in cerca del coniglio che si era già rifugiato sotto il divano.</p> <p>Jessie dette un’occhiata al calendario. «Quindi ci restano solo undici giorni?»</p>
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<p>“He’s really going to make us move right after Christmas?” asked Isa.</p> <p>“Is it because I can’t keep Franz quiet?” asked Hyacinth as she chewed her fingernails. When Franz heard Hyacinth say his name, his tail gave a little wag and his eyes fluttered open, then drifted closed again.</p> <p>“I think it’s my fault,” Isa said.</p> <p>Her siblings stared at her. No one could imagine perfect Isa ever being the cause of getting kicked out of their home.</p> <p>“You know, because my violin playing.”</p> <p>“Kids, it’s no one’s fault,” Mama interjected.</p> <p>“Remember how Papa and Uncle Arthur installed those energy-saving windows last year? Those windows are much more soundproof than the old ones. We’ve done all we can to try to persuade Mr. Beiderman to let us stay. I even left a box of lavender macarons outside his door.” Mama blinked rapidly. As a professional pastry chef, she took macarons very seriously.</p> <p>“What a waste,” grumbled Oliver, who also took macarons very seriously.</p> <p>“Will our new place have a basement? So I can practice?” Isa asked.</p> <p>“I’m only moving if I can have a science lab in the new place. With a Bunsen burner. And new Erlenmeyer flasks,” Jessie said stubbornly.</p>	<p>«Ci farà davvero andare via subito dopo Natale?» chiese Isa.</p> <p>«È perché non riesco a tenere buono Franz?» chiese Viola intenta a mordersi le unghie. A sentir pronunciare il suo nome, il cane agitò la coda, spalancò gli occhi per poi richiuderli di nuovo.</p> <p>«Credo sia colpa mia» intervenne Isa.</p> <p>I fratelli la guardarono sbigottiti: nessuno riusciva a immaginarsi come potesse essere Isa, sempre perfetta, la responsabile del loro obbligato trasferimento.</p> <p>«Perché suono il violino.»</p> <p>«Bambini, non è colpa di nessuno» intervenne la mamma. «Vi ricordate quando l’anno scorso papà e lo zio Arthur hanno installato le finestre a risparmio energetico? Ecco, sono molto più isolanti di quelle vecchie. Abbiamo fatto il possibile per convincerlo a farci rimanere. Gli ho addirittura lasciato una scatola di macarons alla lavanda davanti alla porta.» La mamma sbatté nervosamente le ciglia; da pasticcera prendeva molto sul serio i suoi macarons.</p> <p>«Che spreco» brontolò Oliver; anche lui prendeva i macarons molto sul serio.</p> <p>«La nostra nuova casa avrà una cantina dove potrò suonare il violino?» chiese Isa.</p> <p>«Mi trasferisco solo se potrò avere un laboratorio per i miei esperimenti. Con un bruciatore Bunsen, per scaldare le sostanze, e delle beute, per mescolare gli ingredienti» aggiunse Jessie con decisione.</p>
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<p>“My room’s going to look exactly the same, right? Like, <i>exactly</i>?” asked Oliver.</p> <p>“Will we move closed by? So Franz can keep all his doggie friends?” asked Hyacinth. At Hyacinth’s comment, the other kids’ eyes widened. They’d never considered that they might to leave the neighborhood where they knew everyone on the block by name, age, and hairstyle.</p> <p>“I’ve lived in the neighborhood my whole life,” Papa said. “My job is here.” Only Hyacinth noticed that he didn’t answer her question or look anyone in the eye as he said that. “Listen, kids, I have to fix a wobbly banister on the second floor and then taking the building trash out. But we’re not done talking about this, okay?”</p> <p>Papa took his worn blue coveralls off the coat hanger and pulled them over the work clothes he was wearing for his computer repair job; the coveralls looked something an auto mechanic would wear. Papa observed the somber faces of his kids. “I’m really sorry about this. I know you love the place. But I promise, this will turn out okay.” He slipped out the door.</p> <p>The kids hated when their parents talked about things turning out okay. How could they know? Before the kids could start in with questions again, Mama’s cell phone pinged. She glanced at the caller, then back at the kids. “I have to get this. But ... don’t worry. We’ll talk about it</p>	<p>«La mia stanza sarà uguale a questa vero? Proprio <i>spicciata</i>?» chiese Oliver.</p> <p>«Ci spostiamo qua vicino, vero? Così Franz potrà restare insieme ai suoi amici» chiese Viola mentre i fratelli spalancavano gli occhi. Non avevano preso in considerazione la possibilità di lasciare il quartiere dove conoscevano tutti per nome, età e taglio di capelli.</p> <p>«Ho sempre vissuto in questo quartiere» disse il papà. «Ho il lavoro qui.» Solo Viola si accorse che non aveva risposto alla sua domanda e non aveva guardato nessuno negli occhi. «Sentite, bambini, devo sistemare il corrimano traballante del secondo piano e portare fuori la spazzatura del condominio. Continuiamo la conversazione dopo va bene?»</p> <p>Il papà afferrò la tuta blue dall’appendiabiti e se la infilò sopra i vestiti che aveva messo per il suo lavoro di ripara-computer; assomigliava a un meccanico.</p> <p>Prima di uscire guardò le facce tristi dei figli. «Mi dispiace tantissimo. So che questo posto vi piace molto ma vi prometto che andrà tutto bene.»</p> <p>I bambini detestavano sentir dire ai genitori che sarebbe andato tutto bene. Come potevano esserne sicuri? Prima che ricominciassero con le domande, alla mamma squillò il cellulare. «Devo rispondere. Ma... non vi preoccupate ne riparliamo, promesso!» disse dopo aver dato</p>
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more, I promise!” The kids watched her rush up the stairs, then heard her say, “Yes, Ms. Mitchell, thank you for calling. We’re *very* interested in that apartment you listed –” followed by her bedroom door shutting.

“Move!” said Oliver, breaking the silence.

“That’s banana’s! Rotten Biederman.”

“I can’t imagine *not* living here,” Isa said, her fingers running over her violin strings. “I really hope it wasn’t my violin playing that caused all this.”

Isa had discovered Mr. Beiderman’s particular distaste for instruments six years ago, when she was in first grade. She was performing “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star” on her tiny, one-eight-sized instrument for their second-floor neighbor, Miss Josie. Isa stood outside Miss Josie’s apartment, but halfway through her song, Mr. Beiderman’s door in the third floor burst open. He yelled down the staircase for the terrible racket to stop or he would call the police. Then the door slammed.

The police! On a six-year-old violinist! Isa was in tears, and Miss Josie invited her in and fed her cookies from a delicate china dish and gave her a pretty lace handkerchief to dry her eyes. Then Miss Josie insisted that Isa keep the handkerchief, which Isa to this day stowed in her violin case.

un’occhiata allo schermo. Tutti e cinque la seguirono con gli occhi mentre saliva le scale e, prima che chiudesse la porta, le sentirono dire: «Si, signora Mitchell, grazie per avermi chiamato. Siamo *molto* interessati all’appartamento in vendita...»

«Andarsene!» esclamò Oliver, rompendo il silenzio. «Sono tutte sciocchezze! Il Beiderman è solo un vecchio bacucco.»

«Non riesco a immaginarci in un’altra casa» disse Isa mentre faceva scorrere le dita lungo le corde del violino. «Spero proprio che non sia tutta colpa mia».

Isa aveva scoperto il profondo disgusto che il signor Beiderman provava per gli strumenti musicali sei anni prima, quando era in prima elementare. Stava suonando *Brilla, brilla la stellina* con il suo violino a un ottavo per la vicina del secondo piano, la signora Josie, ed era arrivata quasi a metà del brano quando la porta al terzo piano si era aperta di colpo e il signor Beiderman le aveva urlato di smettere con quel terribile chiasso sennò avrebbe chiamato la polizia. Poi, aveva sbattuto la porta.

La polizia! Per una violinista di appena sei anni! Isa si era messa a piangere. La signora Josie l’aveva invitata a entrare e l’aveva consolata con dei biscotti che teneva su un elegante piatto di porcellana. Poi, per asciugare le lacrime, le aveva regalato un fazzoletto

“It makes no sense,” said Jessie, pacing back and forth between the couch and the picture window. She ran her hands through her wild hair, which made her look like a crazed scientist. “Newton’s third law says that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. Now consider this: Papa does so much for the building. He keeps the front door clean, he rakes leaves, he shovels snow. He saves the Beiderman so much money by doing all the repairs himself. So what about Newton’s third law? The Beiderman kicking us out of the building is *not* an equal reaction.”

“I want to see a Newton!” exclaimed Laney.

“I don’t think the law applies here,” said Isa, unconsciously adjusting her neat ponytail into an even neater ponytail.

“Newton’s law applies to everything,” Jessie said with her I’m-right-and-no-one-can-convince-me-otherwise voice.

“Uncle Arthur helps with the big repairs,” Oliver commented as he searched through the stack of ancient encyclopedias for the one marked with an *N*.

“Papa does all the daily stuff,” Jessie pointed out. “And he fixes Uncle Arthur’s laptop whenever it breaks.”

Oliver pulled the correct encyclopedia from the stack and flipped through it. “Newton is this

finemente ricamato che Isa teneva ancora nella custodia del violino.

«Non ha senso» disse Jessie, camminando su e giù tra il divano e la finestra. Si passò le mani tra i capelli ribelli sembrando ancora di più uno scienziato pazzo. «La terza legge di Newton dice che a ogni azione corrisponde una reazione uguale e contraria. Se consideriamo che papà fa tante cose per il condominio, tiene pulito il portone, raccoglie le foglie, spala la neve, e tutto da solo facendo risparmiare al Beiderman un sacco di soldi; allora, se lui ci butta fuori casa, vuol dire che la reazione non è *uguale* e, quindi, la legge di Newton è sbagliata?»

«Voglio vedere un Newton!» esclamò Sofie.

«Non credo che la legge si possa applicare in questo caso» disse Isa, aggiustandosi in automatico la coda già perfetta.

«Le leggi di Newton si applicano a tutto» disse Jessie con tono inflessibile.

«Anche lo zio Arthur aiuta per le riparazioni più grandi» aggiunse Oliver mentre cercava tra le varie enciclopedie quella con la lettera *N*.

«Sì, ma è papà che si occupa di tutti i lavori più piccoli» precisò Jessie. «E ripara sempre il computer dello zio quando si rompe».

Oliver prese l’enciclopedia giusta dalla pila e iniziò a sfogliarla. «Newton è questo tizio» disse a Sofie indicando una foto.

guy,” he said to Laney, pointing to a photo in the book.

“He has *very* nice hair,” said Laney, running her fingers over the picture.

“Don’t read that,” scolded Jessie. “Those books are sixty years old and full of inaccurate science.”

“Okay, people,” Isa interrupted. “Let’s get back on topic. I figure we have until Christmas to convince the Beiderman to let us stay.”

“That’s only four and a half days!” Jessie exclaimed. She looked at her watch. “One hundred and six hours.”

“Exactly. Less than five days, people. Who has ideas?”

“Give him lots of hugs?” suggested Laney.

Oliver rubbed his hands together and raised one eyebrow. “Let’s spray-paint the door.” He gave a dramatic pause. “With disgusting bathroom words.”

Isa ignored her brother. “Laney, I think you’re right. We *should* try to do nice things for the Beiderman. You know, change his mind about us.”

Jessie and Oliver looked skeptical. Hyacinth looked scared. Laney looked ready to give out hugs. Lots of hugs.

After a long silence, Oliver shrugged. “I’d be willing to do nice things for him. *If* he lets us stay.”

«Mi piacciono i suoi capelli!» disse Sofie facendo scorrere le dita sull’immagine.

«Non leggere quella roba» disse Jessie. «Quei libri sono vecchi di sessant’anni e sono pieni di imprecisioni scientifiche».

«Va bene gente» si intromise Isa. «Adesso concentriamoci sul nostro problema. A quanto pare abbiamo tempo fino a Natale per convincere il Beiderman a farci restare.»

«Ma sono solo quattro giorni e mezzo!» esclamò Jessie. «Centosei ore» aggiunse controllando l’orologio.

«Giusto. Meno di cinque giorni! Chi ha qualche idea?» chiese Isa.

«Riempirlo di abbracci?» propose Sofie.

Oliver si strofinò le mani e inarcò le sopracciglia. «Imbrattiamogli la porta di vernice!» disse; poi, dopo una breve pausa, aggiunse: «Con tante parole disgustose!»

«Credo che tu abbia ragione, Sofie» disse Isa ignorando il fratello. «Dovremmo provare a fare delle cose carine così da fargli cambiare idea su di noi».

Jessie e Oliver si mostrarono scettici all’idea, Viola sembrava impaurita e Sofie pronta a distribuire tanti abbracci.

Dopo un lungo silenzio, Oliver fece spallucce e disse: «Sono disposto a fargli delle cose carine, *basta* che ci faccia rimanere però.»

<p>“I guess I can try to be nice to him,” Jessie says. Isa gave her a grateful look. “Although if this doesn’t work, Oliver and I totally get to spray-paint his door. What do you think, Hyacinth?”</p> <p>“He scares me,” Hyacinth said, chewing at her pinky finger.</p> <p>“It’s five against one!” said Oliver. “What could he do to us, anyway?”</p> <p>“I know you can do this,” Isa said to Hyacinth. “You need to channel Hyacinth the Brave.”</p> <p>Hyacinth nodded but continued gnawing in her pinky.</p> <p>Isa mused. “Wouldn’t it be great if we were able to convince the Beiderman to let us stay? It would be like giving Mama and Papa the most amazing Christmas present ever.”</p> <p>The Vanderbeeker kids thought about giving their parents the Best Christmas Present Ever. Of course, Hyacinth had already made presents for them – she had completed them two months ago – but she liked the idea of a group gift. Oliver, who had spent quite a bit of time contemplating what was going to <i>get</i> for Christmas, just remembered he was expected to <i>give</i> gifts as well.</p> <p>“Mama and Papa deserve an amazing present from us,” Oliver decided. “Let’s keep it a secret.”</p> <p>Isa looked at him. “You haven’t gotten them anything yet, have you?”</p> <p>Oliver quickly changed the topic. “If it’s a secret, we need to make sure you-know-who</p>	<p>«Credo di poterci riuscire anch’io» disse Jessie mentre Isa la ringraziava con lo sguardo.</p> <p>«Ma se non funziona Oliver e io gli riempiamo la porta di vernice eh! Tu che ne pensi Viola?»</p> <p>«Ho paura» rispose Viola, mordendosi il mignolo.</p> <p>«Siamo cinque contro uno!» disse Oliver.</p> <p>«Non potrà farci niente, no?»</p> <p>«So che puoi farcela», le disse Isa. «Devi solo essere Viola la Coraggiosa». La sorella annuì ma continuò a mordersi il mignolo.</p> <p>Dopo aver riflettuto un po’, Isa disse: «Non sarebbe fantastico se riuscissimo davvero a convincere il Beiderman a farci rimanere? Sarebbe un regalo di Natale perfetto per mamma e papà!»</p> <p>L’idea di un regalo di gruppo piacque molto a tutti e cinque. Anche a Viola che aveva già preparato tutti i regali da due mesi. Oliver, invece, aveva passato così tanto tempo a pensare a quali regali avrebbe ricevuto che si era dimenticato di doverne fare anche lui in cambio.</p> <p>«Sì, dobbiamo fare un bel regalo a mamma e papà, se lo meritano!» esclamò. «Ma deve essere un segreto!»</p> <p>«Non hai ancora comprato niente, vero?» disse Isa guardandolo.</p> <p>Oliver cambiò subito discorso e, indicando verso Sofie con la testa, aggiunse: «Speriamo</p>
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doesn't spill the beans." He gave a not-so-discreet nod toward Laney.

"Laney, this is a secret," instructed Jessie.

"Right," Laney agreed promptly.

"Right, what?" Jessie said.

"Right, let's be nice to Beegermack," Laney said.

"Yes, but we're going to keep it a secret from Mama and Papa. Right, Laney?" Jessie prompted.

"Right!"

The five kids started exchanging ideas for winning over the man on the third floor. Operation Beiderman had officially begun.

They tried to feel hopeful about their plan, but in the back of each of their minds, they were all thinking the same thing: How do you make friends with a man you have never seen and who has not left his apartment in six years?

Two

The northern side of 141st Street was buffered by brownstones standing shoulder to shoulder, as if marching in formation. The buildings were all about the same height, with a ground floor (called the garden level) and three more rising above. Some brownstones, like the one the

che qualcuno di nostra conoscenza non faccia una soffiata!»

«Sofie devi ricordarti che è un segreto!» disse Jessie alla sorella.

«Va bene!» rispose subito Sofie.

«Va bene cosa?» chiese Jessie.

«Va bene che dobbiamo essere gentili con il Doberman» rispose Sofie.

«Sì, ma dobbiamo tenerlo nascosto a mamma e papà. Va bene Sofie?» insistette Jessie.

«Okay!»

I fratelli iniziarono a pensare a vari modi per conquistare l'uomo del terzo piano.

L'operazione Beiderman era ufficialmente iniziata.

Ma per quanto cercassero di essere positivi, in fondo in fondo stavano pensando tutti la stessa cosa: come potevano diventare amici di un uomo che non avevano mai visto e che non usciva dal suo appartamento da sei anni?

Due

La 141^{aa} strada era stretta ed alberata. Procedendo verso nord, si innalzavano una serie di edifici disposti uno di fianco all'altro, come in schieramento. Erano all'incirca della stessa altezza, con un piano terra che dava su un giardino, e tre piani soprastanti. Alcuni, come quello in cui abitavano i Vanderbecker,

Vanderbeekers lived in also had a basement, which Jessie referred to as the dungeon.

Although all the brownstones on the narrow, tree-lined street were the same size, each one had its own personality. One brownstone was rotund – like a jolly, well-fed grand-father – with a curved façade and decorative curlicues above round, owlsh windows. A few skips down stood a perfectly symmetrical brownstone with a more regal disposition, which stood in direct contrast to its frivolous neighbor a brownstone with flashy turrets and multicolored shingles that sparkled on sunny days.

On the southern side of the street were a mix of larger apartment buildings, and at either end of the block were churches that had recently celebrated their centennials. Next to one of the churches sat a narrow piece of abandoned land, which Miss Josie always talked about making into a community garden and Oliver wanted converted into a basketball court. Two blocks to the west was a thin sliver of a park built into a rocky hill. At the top of the hill was a series of castle-like structures that made up the City College of New York's Harlem campus.

The sidewalks of 141st Street were wide, but the street was narrow. Majestic street lamps were staggered on both sides of the sidewalks,

avevano anche una cantina, che Jessie chiamava *gattabuia*. Nonostante le dimensioni molto simili, ciascun edificio aveva la propria personalità. Uno era bello rotondo, come un simpatico nonnino buongustaio, aveva la facciata un po' curva e ghirigori che decoravano le finestre a forma di cerchio, come gli occhi di un gufo. Qualche saltello più in giù si trovava un altro edificio, perfettamente simmetrico e dall'aspetto più maestoso che contrastava con quello più sbarazzino dell'edificio successivo, con torrette sgargianti e tegole variopinte che risplendevano al sole.

Procedendo verso sud lungo la via, le palazzine diventavano più grandi e su alcuni incroci c'erano anche delle chiese che avevano da poco festeggiato il loro centenario. Accanto a una di questa chiese c'era un pezzettino di terra abbandonato che la signora Josie proponeva sempre di trasformare in orto urbano, mentre Oliver se lo immaginava come campo da basket. Spostandosi di altri due incroci verso ovest, si intravedeva un parchetto che era stato costruito ai piedi di una collinetta rocciosa in cima alla quale si trovavano una serie di edifici simili a castelli che componevano il distaccamento di Harlem del City College di New York, uno dei college più importanti della città.

Lungo la strada, lo spazio dedicato alle macchine era stretto mentre i marciapiedi erano ampi e illuminati da lampioni imponenti,

spaced fifty paces apart. The posts stretched past the first floor of the brownstone, then curved over like a crashing wave. In the evening, the warm glow of the lights made passersby feel that this street might have looked the same one hundred years earlier.

The Vanderbeeker's home – a humble red brownstone with a weathervane that spun on windy days – sat in the exact middle of the street. The brownstone stood out not because of its architecture, but because of the constant hum of activity that burst out of it. Among the many people who had visited the Vanderbeeker household there was quite a bit of debate about what it was like, but general agreement about what it was NOT:

Calm
Tidy
Boring
Predictable

At the moment, the things the Vanderbeeker household were NOT seemed more pronounced than usual. The kids had relocated their Beiderman meeting to Jessie and Isa's bedroom upstairs, where the ancient radiator whistled cheerfully at their arrival. Isa pulled out the easel and stood ready to jot notes, marker in hand. Hyacinth was making Operation Beiderman buttons for the kids to wear for their

distribuiti su entrambi i lati a cinquanta passi di distanza. I pali si alzavano fino a superare il primo piano degli edifici, per poi ricadere curvi sulla carreggiata come onde che si infrangono. Di sera, la tonalità calda delle luci dava ai passanti l'impressione che l'aspetto della strada fosse rimasto lo stesso di cent'anni prima.

La casa dei Vanderbeeker si trovava precisamente a metà della 141^{aa} strada; era un edificio senza troppe pretese, dai tipici mattoni rossi e con una banderuola sul tetto che girava seguendo la direzione del vento. Se si faceva notare non era tanto per l'architettura quanto per un continuo brulicare di movimento. Tra le tante persone che erano state ospiti a casa dei Vanderbeeker si era creato una sorta di dibattito su come poterla descrivere. Il consenso generale diceva che sicuramente NON era:

Tranquilla
Ordinata
Noiosa
Prevedibile

E proprio in quel momento si poteva dire che tutti questi NON-essere erano più pronunciati che mai. I bambini avevano spostato la riunione per la questione Beiderman nella camera di Jessie e Isa al primo piano, dove entrando vennero subito accolti dal fischiaccio del vecchio radiatore. Isa tirò fuori il cavalletto e con un pennarello in mano si preparò ad annotare tutto. Viola stava preparando delle

brainstorming sessions. Laney had discovered a box of flower clips under Isa's bed and was attaching each one to her ponytail.

As the kids settled in, Isa looked out at her siblings. As a biracial family, the kids exhibited an eclectic mix of physical characteristics and loved comparing which traits they got from what parents. Isa inherited her mother's stick-straight black hair, which Isa always wore in a sleek ponytail or an elegant French braid, while her twin Jessie had Papa's wild, untamable hair, which she never bothered to do anything with. Oliver had Papa's unruly hair but Mama's dark eyes. Hyacinth got Mama's nimble fingers but Papa's large feet. Laney was the exact blend of both of her parents; her hair was a shade of dark brown you would get if you swirled her parents' hair colors together on an artist's palette, her feet not too small or large, and her eyes were darker than her papa's but lighter than her mama's.

Isa cleared her throat and tapped her marker on the easel. After the room quieted down and she called their meeting to order, she made the first Operation Beiderman suggestions.

"We could sing Christmas carols to him," she suggested. "You know, bring him a little Christmas spirit."

"What if he's Jewish? Would Christmas carols offend him?" asked Jessie from her spot by the radiator.

spille da indossare durante le riunioni di aggiornamento dell'Operazione Beiderman.

Sofie si stava attaccando alla coda delle mollette a forma di cuore che aveva scovato in una scatola sotto il letto di Viola.

Mentre si mettevano tutti seduti, Isa li guardò con attenzione. La loro era una famiglia multietnica e, siccome tutti e cinque mostravano chiaramente un miscuglio eclettico di tratti fisici, si divertivano a indovinare cosa avevano ereditato e da quale genitore. Isa aveva i capelli neri e lisci come spaghetti della madre e li teneva sempre legati in una bella coda o in un'elegante treccia alla francese. Jessie, invece, aveva preso dal padre i capelli ribelli e ingestibili, che non si era mai preoccupata di domare. Anche Oliver aveva i capelli del papà ma aveva ereditato dalla mamma gli occhi scuri. Viola aveva le dita affusolate della mamma ma i piedi grandi del papà. Sofie, invece, era la fusione perfetta dei genitori: i capelli erano di una tonalità scura di castano che si poteva ottenere mischiando i colori dei capelli dei genitori sulla tavolozza di un pittore, i piedi non erano né piccoli né grandi, e gli occhi erano più scuri di quelli del papà ma più chiari di quelli della mamma.

Isa si schiarì la gola e batté col pennarello sul cavalletto. Non appena nella stanza calò il silenzio, dette inizio ufficialmente alla riunione e iniziò con qualche proposta.

<p>“We could sing Christmas <i>and</i> Hanukkah songs,” said Isa.</p> <p>“<i>I have a little dreidel, I made it out of clay,</i>” sang Laney, off-key and very loud. Her head looked like a garden, with the flower clips attached all over it.</p> <p>Oliver stuck fingers in his ears and winced. “That is just really, really bad.”</p> <p>“Maybe no dreidel songs,” Isa said as Laney continued chanting, “<i>Dreidel, dreidel, dreidel, I made it out of clay!</i>”</p> <p>“I have a feeling he won’t want us singing to him,” said Jessie, glancing at Laney. “I don’t know, it’s just a hunch.”</p> <p>“<i>Dreidel, dreidel, dreidel!</i>” Laney sang.</p> <p>Isa put a hand over Laney’s mouth to muffle her singing. “How about doing something to help around the building, like planting flowers or something? Miss Josie can help. She’s great with flowers.”</p> <p>“It’s winter. Flowers aren’t going to grow now,” Jessie said matter-of-factly.</p> <p>“How about poinsettias? That’s a holiday-ish flower,” said Isa.</p>	<p>«Potremmo cantargli qualche canzone di Natale per portargli un po’ di gioia natalizia» propose.</p> <p>«E se fosse ebreo, non si sentirebbe offeso dalle canzoni di Natale?» domandò Jessie dal suo angolino accanto al radiatore.</p> <p>«Allora potremmo cantargli sia delle canzoni di Natale che quelle di Hanukkah» le rispose Isa.</p> <p>«Siii, una di quelle sulle trottole d’argilla!» urlò Sofie a squarciagola, scuotendo la testa ormai simile ad un giardino colorato di mollette a forma di fiore.</p> <p>Oliver si ficcò le dita nelle orecchie e fece una smorfia disgustato. «Non mi sembra una grande idea!»</p> <p>«Meglio evitare le canzoni» intervenne Isa mentre Sofie aveva iniziato a intonare qualche canzoncina.</p> <p>«Mi sa che al Beiderman non piacerebbe sentirci cantare» convenne Jessie. «Diciamo che è solo un presentimento» aggiunse guardando Sofie che continuava la sua esibizione.</p> <p>Isa coprì le urla di Sofie tappandole la bocca con la mano e propose: «E se facessimo qualcosa per migliorare l’edificio? Tipo piantare dei fiori. La signora Josie ci potrebbe aiutare, è bravissima con le piante.»</p> <p>«Siamo in inverno, i fiori non crescono adesso» sentenziò Jessie.</p>
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<p>Hyacinth wrapped protective arms around Franz, who was sitting at her feet, and glared at Isa. “<i>Poinsettias</i> are poisonous to animals.”</p> <p>“What about wreaths?” Isa said.</p> <p>“Too expensive,” said Oliver.</p> <p>Jessie huffed in frustration. “Okay, I see multiple problems.” She ticked them off on her fingers. “One – he doesn’t like us. Two – we have no money. Three – none of us has actually seen or met the Beiderman and we know nothing about him. Four – he doesn’t want to be disturbed. Five – he doesn’t like us.”</p> <p>“That’s the thing,” said Isa. “I’m sure there’s a way to show him that us living here is better than us <i>not</i> living here.”</p> <p>“Yeah, but how?” Jessie asked. “The only person we’ve ever seen go up there is the bird lady who drops off groceries once a week.” The bird lady was aptly nicknamed; she resembled a crane, with her long skinny legs and pointy beak nose.</p> <p>Oliver shook his head. “She won’t be any help. I said hi to her a few times and she walked past me like I wasn’t even there. But I did peek into a grocery bag she left downstairs once. It was filled with frozen dinners.”</p> <p>“Yuck,” said Hyacinth.</p> <p>Jessie moved to her desk and switched on the computer she shared with Isa. “I’m going to see</p>	<p>«Ma ci sono le stelle di Natale; sarebbero perfette!» rispose Isa.</p> <p>Viola strinse Franz, che le stava seduto vicino ai piedi, in un abbraccio protettivo. «Sono velenose per gli animali.»</p> <p>«Che ne dite delle ghirlande?» propose Isa.</p> <p>«Troppe costose» ribatté Oliver.</p> <p>Jessie sbuffò seccata «Allora, primo, non gli piacciamo. Secondo, non abbiamo soldi. Terzo, non sappiamo niente su di lui perché nessuno di noi l’ha mai incontrato davvero. Quarto, non vuole essere disturbato. Quinto, non gli piacciamo» disse contando i problemi sulle dita di una mano.</p> <p>«È proprio questo il punto!» disse Isa.</p> <p>«Dobbiamo trovare un modo per convincerlo che conviene anche a lui farci rimanere.»</p> <p>«Si ma come?» chiese Jessie. «L’unica persona che abbiamo visto salire lassù è la ragazza-gru che gli porta la spesa una volta a settimana.» La ragazza “gru” era stata soprannominata così perché aveva le gambe lunghe e scheletriche e il naso a punta.</p> <p>Oliver scosse la testa. «Lei non ci aiuterebbe mai. L’ho salutata un paio di volte e non mi ha nemmeno considerato. Comunque una volta sono riuscito a guardare dentro una busta e ho visto che era piena di piatti pronti.»</p> <p>«Puah!» esclamò Viola.</p> <p>Jessie si sedette alla scrivania e accese il computer che condivideva con Isa. «Vediamo</p>
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if I can find something out about him online.” She tapped some keys, paused, then tapped more keys. “That’s weird. I can’t get online.”

Oliver, who was used to the Internet shutting off at inconvenient times, jumped up. “I’ll reset it.”

His sisters heard him run down the hall, then some murmuring, then his feet stomping back to the twins’ bedroom.

“Internet is shut off,” Oliver announced with a scowl on his face. “Mama said they had to disconnect it today or pay for the whole next month plus a contract renewal fee.”

“Oh great,” Jessie said. “That’s just perfect.”

Isa sensed discontent brewing in the room. “Maybe we need some time to get our best ideas together.” She capped her marker and shoved the blank easel back to the corner of the room. Isa stood up straight and tried to make her voice sound positive and cheerful. “Let’s meet again after dinner. Everyone bring at least two awesome ideas. I know we can do it!”

Her siblings exchanged a look as they left the bedroom. When Isa did that falsely cheery voice thing, it meant she was worried.

Very worried.



The Vanderbecker kids spent the next few hours agonizing over the Beiderman dilemma. How could they convince him to change his

se riesco a trovare qualcosa sul suo conto» Si sentì premere qualche tasto, poi una pausa, poi altri tasti. «Strano» disse. «Non riesco a collegarmi.»

Oliver, ormai abituato alla connessione che se saltava nei momenti meno opportuni, balzò in piedi ed esclamò: «Vado a resettarla.»

Le sorelle lo sentirono sfrecciare nel corridoio, borbottare qualcosa e ritornare in camera strascicando i piedi. «Internet è morto» annunciò imbronciato.

«Grandioso» disse Jessie. «Proprio quello che ci voleva!»

Isa iniziò a sentire del malumore ribollire nella stanza. Tappò il pennarello e rimise il cavalletto al suo posto. «Forse abbiamo bisogno di un po’ di tempo per raccogliere le idee. Ciascuno di noi pensi ad almeno due idee fantastiche e troviamoci di nuovo dopo cena. Sono sicura che possiamo farcela!» disse in tono fiducioso dopo essersi alzata in piedi.

I fratelli uscirono dalla stanza scambiandosi qualche occhiata poco convinta. Quando Isa usava quel finto tono allegro voleva dire che era preoccupata.

Molto preoccupata.



I bambini passarono le ore successive scervellandosi per trovare una soluzione. Come potevano convincere il Beiderman a cambiare

mind? After all, it was only five days until Christmas.

Oliver had dark thoughts about the Beiderman as he banged down the stairs, grabbed his puffy jacket, and stepped out into the backyard. It was a space eclipsed by a century-old maple tree that dropped mountains of leaves every year from October to December. Oliver leaped onto the rope swing hanging from one of the many branches. He climbed up the rope so his feet rested on the fat knot at the bottom, and he got the rope swaying. As he gained momentum and height, he closed his eyes and breathed in the crisp cold air. He could almost smell the salty ocean wind. For that moment, he was hanging from the ropes of a pirate ship, racing across seas to confront and challenge the evil Beiderman, a peg-legged man with a long scar on his right cheek who was intent on destruction and mayhem.

In the midst of a nasty gale, he heard Jimmy L yelling at him. Oliver opened his eyes and looked over at the brownstone across the yard, where his friend was waving from his bedroom window on the second floor. Oliver waited for the rope to steady, then ascended the rope Navy SEAL-style by locking it between his feet and squatting and stepping all the way up to the top. He had learned this technique from his PE teacher, Mr. Mendoza – the most awesome human being ever to walk on the planet – who used to be a Navy SEAL himself and now

idea? In fin dei conti mancavano solo cinque giorni a Natale.

Pensando a qualche brutto scherzo da fargli, Oliver si fiondò giù per le scale, agguantò il piumino e uscì in cortile, dove l'erba era ormai completamente nascosta sotto le montagne di foglie che, tra ottobre e dicembre, cascavano da un acero centenario. Saltò per aggrapparsi alla corda che penzolava da uno dei rami e con uno slancio si arrampicò fino a raggiungere uno dei nodi più bassi dove appoggiò i piedi alleggerendo la tensione della corda. Chiuse gli occhi e respirò nella pungente aria invernale. Poteva sentire l'odore del vento oceanico mentre stava aggrappato a una delle corde di una nave pirata che solcava i mari per scovare e affrontare il malvagio Beiderman, un uomo diabolico, con una gamba sola e una lunga cicatrice lungo la guancia sinistra, che seminava caos e distruzione.

Si trovava nel bel mezzo di una terribile tempesta, quando sentì che Jimmy lo stava chiamando. Aprì gli occhi e guardò l'edificio dall'altra parte del cortile; l'amico lo stava salutando dalla finestra della sua stanza, al secondo piano. Aspettò che la corda si fermasse e, bloccandola tra i piedi, risalì con l'agilità di un soldato, piegando e stendendo le gambe fino a raggiungere la cima. Aveva imparato quella tecnica dal suo insegnante di ginnastica, il maestro Mendoza, l'essere umano più fantastico che fosse mai esistito, un ex

<p>challenged each of his students to climb a rope as fast as he could.</p> <p>The top of the rope led to the start of the tree plank Uncle Arthur had made him last year. Papa was hopeless with larger-scale construction projects and big repairs, so Uncle Arthur usually did those things for him.</p> <p>Oliver hopped into the sun-warmed plank. He scared off a squirrel that was sitting on the lid of the wood bin that held all his stuff; then he opened the lid and rummage through the contents. There was a pack of spare batteries, a flashlight, a handful of granola bars, a first-aid kit (his Uncle Arthur insisted), and two bottles of orange Fanta that Oliver had to hide from his mother. At last he found what he was looking for: the walkie-talkie he shared with Jimmy L. The walkie -talkies were very useful since neither his or Jimmy L’s parents let them have cell phones. Oliver clicked the walkie-talkie on and the radio buzzed to life.</p> <p>Oliver heard static; Jimmy L’s voice came through the device. “Captain Kidd, come in. Over.”</p> <p>“Magic Jay, this is Captain Kidd,” Oliver responded. Magic Jay, Jimmy L’s secret agent name, was riffed from his favorite basketball player, the legendary Magic Johnson. Captain Kidd was taken from the notorious pirate.</p>	<p>soldato che adesso si divertiva a sfidare i suoi studenti a salire la corda nel minor tempo possibile.</p> <p>Aveva raggiunto la casa sull’albero che lo zio Arthur gli aveva costruito l’anno prima. Papà era negato con i progetti su larga scala e le grandi riparazioni, quindi era lo zio che se ne occupava di solito.</p> <p>Oliver saltò sull’asse intiepidita dalla luce del sole, spaventò uno scoiattolo che si era seduto sul coperchio della cesta di legno con dentro tutte le sue cose, e la aprì iniziando a passarne in rassegna il contenuto. Trovò un pacchetto di pile di scorta, una torcia, una manciata di barrette d’avena, un kit di pronto soccorso (imposto dallo zio) e due bottiglie di Fanta che doveva tenere nascoste dalla mamma. Alla fine trovò anche quello che stava cercando: il walkie talkie per parlare con Jimmy. Quegli aggeggi erano molto utili visto che non potevano avere ancora il cellulare. Oliver accese il walkie-talkie e la ricetrasmittente si attivò; poi, immobile, si mise in ascolto. La voce di Jimmy arrivò dall’apparecchio.</p> <p>«Capitano Kidd, mi riceve? Passo e chiudo.»</p> <p>«Magic J, qui Capitano Kidd» rispose Oliver. Il nome in codice di Jimmy riprendeva quello del suo giocatore di basket preferito, il leggendario Magic Johnson; “Capitano Kidd”, invece, si ispirava al ben noto pirata.</p>
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<p>Oliver heard Jimmy L sigh through the walkie-talkie. “Captain Kidd, you need to say, “Go Ahead.”</p> <p>“Oh yeah. Sorry. Magic Jay, go ahead.”</p> <p>“All quiet here. Over.”</p> <p>“Potential disastrous situation here at one-seven-seven West One-Four-One Street,” Oliver said. “Immediate attention required. How copy?”</p> <p>“Captain Kidd, I copy that. “Elaborate. Over.”</p> <p>“The Beiderman – you know, our landlord? – he’s forcing us to move. We have to leave by the end of the moth. Over”.</p> <p>There was a long pause. Oliver pressed the button to talk again. “Magic Jay, radio check. Over.”</p> <p>Jimmy L’s voice came through the device, loud enough to make the squirrel that was attempting a granola bar theft scurry away. “Are you <i>serious</i> Oliver?”</p> <p>Oliver grimaced. Jimmy L had broken conversation protocol, which had never happened before in the history of their walkie-talkie relationship.</p> <p>“Yeah. My parents just told us,” Oliver said into his device.</p> <p>“This is the neighbor dude who yelled at your dad when we hit the baseball into his window?”</p> <p>“That’s the one,” Oliver replied.</p> <p>“That’s so wrong, man. He can’t take away your home.”</p>	<p>Oliver sentì Jimmy sospirare. «Capitano Kidd, devi dire “ricevuto”.»</p> <p>«Si, giusto. Scusa! Magic J, ricevuto.»</p> <p>«Qui tutto tranquillo. Passo.»</p> <p>«Qui codice rosso all’uno-sette-sette, strada uno-quattro-uno, direzione ovest. Si richiede massima attenzione. Ricevuto?»</p> <p>«Ricevuto Capitano Kidd. Informazione elaborata. Passo.»</p> <p>«Ti ricordi il Beiderman, il nostro padrone di casa? Ci obbliga a trasferirci, dobbiamo andarcene entro la fine del mese. Passo.»</p> <p>Dopo una lunga pausa Oliver premette di nuovo il tasto per parlare. «Magic J, prova recezione. Passo.»</p> <p>Questa volta la voce di Jimmy arrivò così alta da far scappare lo scoiattolo che si stava preparando ad attaccare una barretta d’avena. «CHE COSA?»</p> <p>Oliver storse la bocca. Era la prima volta da quando avevano iniziato a parlare tramite walkie-talkie che Jimmy rompeva il protocollo di comunicazione.</p> <p>«Si, i miei ce l’hanno appena detto» gli spiegò.</p> <p>«Ma è quel tizio che urlava a tuo papà quando gli abbiamo colpito la finestra con la palla da baseball?» chiese Jimmy.</p> <p>«Proprio lui» rispose Oliver.</p> <p>«Ma non è giusto. Non può buttarvi fuori casa!»</p>
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<p>“He’s doing it. Papa says we’re staying in the neighborhood, though.”</p> <p>“What about the treehouse? What about our walkie-talkies man! We saved up for two months for these things.”</p> <p>“We’re trying to convince Beiderman to let us stay,” Oliver said lamely. That head-squeezing feeling he had felt back when his parents first told him the news had returned.</p> <p>“Let me know what happens, man. I can help you. Over.”</p> <p>Jimmy L was back to the walkie-talkie protocol, which Oliver took as a good sign. “Thanks. We on for basketball on Sunday? Over.”</p> <p>“Yeah, man. Current ETA for basketball game on Sunday is fourteen hundred hours. How copy?”</p> <p>“Magic Jay, I copy that. Over.”</p> <p>“And, Oliver?”</p> <p>“Yeah?”</p> <p>“I really don’t want you to move.”</p> <p>Oliver looked over al Jimmy L’s window, but his friend had disappeared from the view. The sun dropped behind a building, and a shadow fell across the treehouse. “Magic Jay, I read you loud and clear. Over.”</p>	<p>«Invece può. Papà dice che rimarremo comunque nel quartiere.»</p> <p>«Che ne sarà della casa sull’albero! E dei nostri walkie-talkie! Abbiamo risparmiato due mesi per averli.»</p> <p>«Stiamo cercando di convincere il Beiderman a farci rimanere» disse Oliver con tono poco convinto. Sentì di nuovo la testa farsi pesante come quando i genitori gli avevano dato la notizia.</p> <p>«Fammi sapere come va e se posso fare qualcosa. Passo e chiudo.»</p> <p>Jimmy era tornato al protocollo di comunicazione e Oliver si sentì rassicurato. «Grazie. Siamo d’accordo per l’allenamento di basket di domenica? Passo.»</p> <p>«Si certo. Siamo a mille e quattrocento ore di allenamento, ricevuto?»</p> <p>«Ricevuto Magic J. Passo.»</p> <p>«E... Oliver?»</p> <p>«Cosa?»</p> <p>«Non voglio che vi trasferite.»</p> <p>Oliver guardò verso la finestra di Jimmy, ma l’amico se n’era già andato. Mentre il sole calava dietro un edificio, un’ombra coprì la casa sull’albero «Ricevuto forte e chiaro, Magic J. Passo e chiudo.»</p>
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Three

Hyacinth always had her best ideas when surrounded by her favorite things: scraps of odd-shaped fabric, buttons of many shapes, fat spools of thread in a rainbow of colors, and paper packets with deadly-looking sewing needles. Hyacinth's yellow paisley dress – her own creation – was made from an old pillowcase with holes cut out for her arms and head. She knotted a wide lavender ribbon around her waist to complete the look.

Sitting in the middle of the living room, Hyacinth rummaged through her ribbon collection as she tried to think of something to make for the Beiderman. It would have to be something so spectacular that he would change his mind about forcing them to move.

When Franz ambled by, Hyacinth took out a piece of green ribbon and draped it over him. His tail wagged, about a 200 on the wpm, or wags par minute, meter.

Out of the corner of her eye, Hyacinth spotted her mom leave the kitchen, disappear into the laundry room, then reappear lugging a stack of collapsed boxes that had been stored behind the washing machine. But they weren't just regular boxes. They were moving boxes.

Hyacinth's bleak mood was interrupted by Franz's happy yowl, followed by the sound of the mail slot opening and stack of envelopes and magazines dropping onto the floor. Hyacinth

Tre

A Viola le idee migliori venivano quando si circondava delle sue cose preferite: pezzi di tessuto dalle forme più bizzarre, bottoni di diverse grandezze, rocchetti di filo belli panciuti dai mille colori e scatoline contenenti minacciosi aghi da cucito. Il vestitino giallo con motivo floreale che indossava era una sua creazione; lo aveva realizzato utilizzando una vecchia federa e tagliando dei buchi per le braccia e la testa. Come tocco finale, aveva abbinato un nastro largo color lavanda che si era legata in vita.

Se ne stava seduta in mezzo al salotto intenta a rovistare tra i suoi nastri mentre pensava a cosa fare per il Beiderman. Doveva essere qualcosa di spettacolare, così da fargli cambiare idea e non doversi trasferire. Franz le trotterellò incontro; Viola tagliò un pezzettino di nastro verde e lo avvolse intorno al cane che dimenava la coda a una velocità media di 200 p/m, pennellate al minuto.

Intanto, con la coda dell'occhio, seguiva la mamma mentre usciva dalla cucina per scomparire in lavanderia, e ricomparire trascinandosi dietro una pila di scatoloni, collassati uno sull'altro, che aveva sistemato dietro la lavatrice. Ma non si trattava di scatoloni qualsiasi. Servivano per il trasloco.

Viola si sentì invadere da un profondo senso di tristezza interrotto dall'ululato felice di

<p>hipped to her feet and followed Franz to the front door. She rotated the locks and pulled the door open.</p> <p>“Hello, Mr. Jones!” said Hyacinth. Mr. Jones had been a postman in her neighborhood since before Papa was born. Franz barked twice and snuffled his nose into the mailbag.</p> <p>“My friends!” Mr. Jones replied, rubbing Franz behind the ears with one hand and giving Hyacinth a high five with the other. He gently nudged Franz’s nose out of the way, then took a biscuit from his mailbag and tossed it to him. Franz swallowed it whole and shamelessly rummaged through the mailbag for more.</p> <p>Mr. Jones was dressed in his usual navy blue parka with the USPS sonic eagle logo, blue pants, black slip-resistant shoes (Mama had bought those for him after Mr. Jones slipped on a patch of ice last winter and sprained his wrist), and a fur cap (also with the sonic eagle logo). Mr. Jones wore a few accessories not sanctioned by the USPS. These were round buttons assigned by Hyacinth with help from her button machine. One said “Mail Rules!” Another said “Love Your Postman,” and the last said “Dogs Are a Postman’s Best Friend.” The dog one was the hardest to read, given the amount of text squeezing onto the tiny circle.</p>	<p>Franz, seguito dal rumore della cassetta della posta che si apriva riversando ai piedi della porta una pila di buste e riviste. Viola balzò in piedi e seguì Franz fino alla porta, che aprì facendo scattare le serrature.</p> <p>«Salve signor Jones!» disse. Il signor Jones era il postino del quartiere prima ancora che il papà nascesse. Franz abbaiò due volte e intrufolò il naso nella borsa piena di posta.</p> <p>«Amici miei!» rispose il signor Jones grattando il cane dietro le orecchie con una mano e battendo un cinque alla bambina con l’altra. Dopo aver allontanato gentilmente il muso del cane dalla borsa, prese un biscotto e glielo lanciò. Franz lo ingoiò tutto intero e, senza vergogna, riconficò il naso nella borsa per averne un altro.</p> <p>Il signor Jones indossava il solito impermeabile blu con il logo della USPS, l’agenzia postale per cui lavorava, insieme a dei pantaloni blu, delle scarpe nere antinfortunistica (che la mamma gli aveva comprato dopo che l’inverno passato era scivolato sul ghiaccio e si era storto un polso) e un cappello in pelliccia (anche questo con il logo dell’agenzia). Indossava anche qualche accessorio permesso dalla USPS, come le spille che Viola aveva creato per lui con la sua spillatrice professionale. Una diceva “Viva la posta”, l’altra “Ama il tuo postino” e l’ultima “Cani e postini sono migliori Amici”. Quella con i cani era la più difficile da leggere perché</p>
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<p>“And how are we doing today, Miss Hyacinth?” Mr. Jones said.</p> <p>“We are fine, thank you,” Hyacinth said in her most polite voice.</p> <p>“Isn’t that so nice to hear,” Mr. Jones said as he took out a handkerchief and polished the three buttons attached to his parka. “Very nice to hear indeed.”</p> <p>Hyacinth picked up a small bag of bone-shaped dog treats from the table next to the door and handed them to Mr. Jones. “These are peanut butter dog treats,” Hyacinth said. “If you haven’t visited Señor Paz yet, I think he would like them.” Señor Paz was an ancient black Chihuahua that lived down the street.</p> <p>“I’m sure Señor Paz will right appreciate these,” Mr. Jones replied, tucking the bag carefully into his pocket. He said <i>sure</i> the same way Hyacinth said <i>shore</i>. “As a matter of fact,” he continued, “I’m heading that way next. Tell me now, did you make these by yourself?”</p> <p>“Yes, I did,” Hyacinth replied, glad he asked. She normally did not offer up this type of information, in case it was considered bragging. “Mama helped, of course.”</p> <p>“Your mama sure does have a hand with the baking,” Mr. Jones said with an agreeable nod. “I don’t know what the neighborhood dogs would do without you, Miss Hyacinth. I thought</p>	<p>il testo, molto lungo, era stato compresso nel cerchietto.</p> <p>«Come andiamo oggi, signora Viola?» chiese il signor Jones.</p> <p>«Tutto bene, grazie» rispose la bambina sfoggiando il suo tono più gentile.</p> <p>«Mi fa molto piacere» disse il postino tirando fuori un fazzoletto e lucidando le tre spille attaccate all’impermeabile. «Davvero molto piacere».</p> <p>Viola agguantò un sacchetto pieno di croccantini dal tavolino accanto alla porta e lo porse al signor Jones. «Questi sono dei croccantini al burro di arachidi. Se non è ancora passato dal señor Paz, credo che gli piacerebbero.» Il señor Paz era un vecchio chihuahua che viveva in fondo alla strada.</p> <p>«Sono <i>seguro</i> che al señor Paz piaceranno moltissimo» le rispose il signor Jones sistemandosi per bene il sacchetto in tasca. «Sto andando proprio da lui. Toglimi una curiosità, li hai fatti da sola?»</p> <p>«Sì» rispose Viola, contenta che glielo avesse chiesto. Di solito non dava questo tipo di informazioni, per non sembrare modesta. «Ma la mamma mi ha aiutato».</p> <p>«Tua mamma ci sa davvero fare con i dolci!» disse il signor Jones approvando con un cenno della testa. «Non so cosa farebbero i cani del quartiere senza di voi, signorina Viola. Poncho ha toccato il cielo con un dito l’ultima volta che ha assaggiato un vostro biscotto.»</p>
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<p>Snuggles had gone to heaven when he tasted the other dog cookie you made.”</p> <p>Thinking about Snuggles made Hyacinth think about her blanket (also named Snuggles), which made her think of her bed and bedroom, which reminded her of the move. “Oh, Mr. Jones! Mama and Papa told us the worst news ever today. We’re moving!” She pulled at the hems of the shirtsleeves and balled the ends into her fists.</p> <p>Mr. Jones’s body appeared to shrink a few inches. “Move? What move?”</p> <p>At that exact moment, Mama skidded into the foyer holding a bag. “Hello!” she said with a big, apologetic smile. “Hello, Mr. Jones! I baked some cookies. Would you like some? Nothing like double chocolate pecan cookies to comfort the tummy and the soul, I always say.”</p> <p>Mr. Jones did not reach out for the bag. “Now tell me straight, Mrs. Vanderbeeker. Are you moving?”</p> <p>Hyacinth noticed that Mama also seemed to shrink a little bit. “Oh, Mr. Jones! I was hoping to tell you first. Our landlord isn’t renewing our lease. We just found out.”</p> <p>“I’ve known your husband since he was born,” Mr. Jones said, accusation in his eyes.</p> <p>“I know, Mr. Jones. You’re like a part of our family,” Mama said, tears coming into her eyes as she nudged Franz’s nose out of the mailbag and tucked the bag of double chocolate pecan cookies in there instead.</p>	<p>Pensando a Poncho, a Viola vennero in mente la sua coperta (calda come un poncho) il suo letto e la sua camera, ricordandosi del trasferimento. «Ah signor Jones. Mama e papà ci hanno dato la peggiore delle notizie oggi. Ci trasferiamo!» disse tirando con le dita i bordi delle maniche e arrotolandoli nei pugni.</p> <p>Il postino sembrò rimpicciolirsi di qualche centimetro. «Trasferirvi? Come trasferirvi?»</p> <p>In quel momento la mamma piombò nell’ingresso con un sacchetto in mano. «Eccomi!» disse scusandosi per l’irruenza con un grande sorriso. «Salve signor Jones! Ho preparato dei cookies, ne vuole qualcuno? Come dico sempre, non c’è niente di meglio che cookies al doppio cioccolato e noci per rallegrare stomaco e spirito.»</p> <p>Il signor Jones non allungò la mano per prendere il sacchetto. «Mi dica la verità signora Vanderbeeker. Vi trasferite?»</p> <p>Viola notò che anche la mamma sembrava farsi più piccola. «Oh signor Jones! Speravo di essere io la prima a dirglielo. Abbiamo appena saputo che il proprietario di casa non ci rinnova l’affitto».</p> <p>«Conosco suo marito da quando è nato» disse il postino con sguardo accusatorio.</p> <p>«Lo so, signor Jones. La consideriamo come di famiglia» disse la mamma con gli occhi che le si riempivano di lacrime mentre cercava di</p>
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<p>“We’re looking for another place in the neighborhood, Mr. Jones. If you hear anything, please let us know,” Mama said.</p> <p>Mr. Jones went quite for a few seconds, then said, “Mr. Beiderman is your landlord?”</p> <p>Hyacinth and Mama nodded.</p> <p>Mr. Jones shook his head and glanced up, as if he expected to see Mr. Beiderman hanging out his third-floor window at that exact moment.</p> <p>“Mr. Beiderman had some hard times,” Mr. Jones said, looking back at them. “Hard times. He bought this brownstone a few months before your family moved in. He used to live a couple blocks away, right by the college. He worked there.”</p> <p>“You <i>knew</i> Mr. Beiderman? What did he do?” Hyacinth asked.</p> <p>“He taught in the art history department.”</p> <p>“He made paintings?”</p> <p>“He studied art and its history. Who made the art, where and when artists lived, what techniques they used. Then he taught students about it,” Mr. Jones said, giving Franz a final head pat.</p> <p>“Well, I best be going. Lots of mail to deliver.”</p> <p>Mr. Jones held up the bag Hyacinth had given</p>	<p>togliere il naso di Franz dalla borsa della posta per metterci il sacchetto di cookies doppio cioccolato e noci.</p> <p>«Stiamo cercando un’altra casa nel quartiere. Se sente qualcosa, ci faccia sapere per favore» disse.</p> <p>Il signor Jones rimase in silenzio per qualche secondo. «Il proprietario è il signor Beiderman?» chiese.</p> <p>Viola e la mamma e annuirono.</p> <p>Il signor Jones scosse la testa e guardò in alto come se si aspettasse di vedere da un momento all’altro il signor Beiderman a penzoloni giù da una delle finestre del terzo piano.</p> <p>«Il signor Beiderman ha passato dei momenti molto difficili» disse, tornando a guardarle.</p> <p>«Ha comprato questo edificio qualche mese prima che la vostra famiglia si trasferisse qui. A quell’epoca abitava a qualche isolato di distanza, proprio accanto al college, dove lavorava.»</p> <p>«Lei <i>conosceva</i> il signor Beiderman? Che lavoro faceva?» chiese Viola.</p> <p>«Insegnava storia dell’arte».</p> <p>«Dipingeva quadri?»</p> <p>«Studiava l’arte e la sua storia. Chi erano gli artisti, dove e quando avevano vissuto, che tecniche avevano usato. E poi lo insegnava ai suoi allievi» le rispose il signor Jones, dando a Franz un ultimo colpetto sulla testa.</p> <p>«È meglio che vada adesso. Ho ancora tanta posta da consegnare». Poi, alzò il sacchetto che</p>
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him. “And dog treats to pass out. Have a good day, now.” He tipped his fur cap and leaned slightly on the bar of his postage cart as he rolled it away from the Vanderbeeker brownstone and down the street. Mama reached over Hyacinth’s head and clicked the door closed, then shuffled back to the kitchen to cook while Hyacinth watched out the window until she couldn’t see Mr. Jones anymore.



Laney – the youngest Vanderbeeker – had transformed into her alter ego, Panda-Laney. A furry white coat was draped over her stout body and she was crawling around, keeping her mama company in the kitchen. She was the only one who was not so concerned about the possibility of moving. If the Beiderman was the only obstacle, Laney knew she could win him over. She loved people! Surely he would love her too.

So instead of thinking about ideas to save her home like Isa had asked, Laney put all her attention on getting double chocolate pecan cookies from Mama. On occasion she pawed her Mama’s feet and was rewarded with a carrot. Laney didn’t like carrots so much – too crunchy and too orange – but Panda-Laney loved them! Panda-Laney also loved cookies – well, Laney liked them too – and if she was lucky and ate

Viola gli aveva dato. «E tanti croccantini da distribuire. Buona giornata! «Si sistemò il cappello e si piegò leggermente sul manubrio del carretto postale allontanandosi per continuare lungo la strada. La mamma allungò un braccio sopra la testa di Viola, chiuse la porta e si trascinò in cucina per preparare la cena mentre la bambina continuò a guardare fuori dalla finestra fino a che non riuscì più a vedere il signor Jones.



Sofie, la più piccola dei Vanderbeeker, si era trasformata nel suo alter ego: Sofie-Panda. Aveva avvolto il corpo ciiccottello in un cappotto bianco e peloso e procedeva carponi per la cucina, tenendo compagnia alla mamma. Era l’unica della famiglia a non essere troppo preoccupata dalla possibilità di doversi trasferire. Se l’unico problema era il Beiderman, sapeva che poteva risolverlo. Adorava le persone e sicuramente anche lui l’avrebbe adorata.

Ecco perché, invece di pensare a qualche modo per salvare la loro casa, come le aveva chiesto Isa, si stava concentrando su come farsi dare i cookies dalla mamma. Qualche volta le dava una zampata sul piede ricevendo una carota come ricompensa; ma le carote non le piacevano, erano troppo croccanti e troppo arancioni. Sofie-Panda, invece, ne andava

three whole carrots, usually a cookie would follow.

Panda-Laney peered around the kitchen island. She spied Paganini, her lop-eared bunny, under the couch.

“Paganini!” Panda-Laney said in a loud whisper. One bunny ear twitched, and Paganini’s nose moved up and down like a motor. The gray rabbit scooted out from under the couch, and – after a suspicious glance in Franz’s direction – hopped toward Panda-Laney’s outstretched hand. Paganini loved it when Panda-Laney came out to play, because that meant carrots. After grabbing the carrot, Paganini dragged it back under the couch and devoured his prize.

Panda-Laney ate the other two carrots with less enthusiasm, then crawled back to her mom’s heels and looked up.

“Okay, you little beggar!” Mama said with a smile. “Just one cookie, and bring one to your sister.” Her mom passed her two cookies. Panda-Laney inspected both with a critical eye. One was a little big larger, but the other was shaped like Paganini. Panda-Laney debated between them before choosing the larger one and giving the Paganini-shaped cookie to Hyacinth, who crammed it in her mouth and mumbled a gloomy “Thanks” without bothering to look up from her ribbons.

matta! E le piacevano tantissimo anche i cookies, come a Sofie d’altronde, e se era fortunata e riusciva a mangiare tre carote intere, otteneva di solito anche un cookie.

Sofie-Panda si mosse guardinga intorno all’isola della cucina e avvistò sotto il divano Paganini, il suo coniglietto grigio dalle lunghe orecchie piegate all’ingiù.

«Paganini!» sussurrò forte Sofie-Panda. Il coniglio drizzò di scatto un orecchio peloso e iniziò a muovere il naso in su e in giù come un motore. Uscì velocemente da sotto il divano e, dopo un’occhiata sospettosa in direzione di Franz, fece un salto verso la mano protesa di Sofie-Panda. A Paganini piaceva molto giocare con Sofie-Panda a mangiare carote! Agguantò la carota, la trascinò sotto il divano e divorò il premio.

Con minor entusiasmo, Sofie-Panda mangiò le altre due carote, ritornò carponi ai piedi della mamma e guardò in alto.

«Va bene piccola peste! Ma uno solo, e portane uno anche a tua sorella» disse la mamma sorridendo e passandole due biscotti. Sofie-Panda si mise a osservarli attentamente. Uno era un pochino più grande, ma l’altro assomigliava a Paganini. Dopo averci riflettuto un po’ sopra, scelse quello più grande e dette l’altro a forma di coniglio a Viola che, senza alzare nemmeno lo sguardo dai nastri, se lo ficcò in bocca sospirando un “Grazie”.



Jessie, wearing jeans and a baggy navy hoodie, was perched on the steps leading to the dungeon with a pile of colored gumdrops and wooden toothpicks in neat piles around her. She was constructing a model molecule by connecting colored gumdrops that were supposed to represent atoms, but she got distracted pretending the gumdrops were the Beiderman's eyes and she was stabbing them with the toothpicks.

Isa was down in the basement, positioned at the bottom of the stairs so she could see Jessie. Her violin was cradled on her shoulder and she was zipping through various etudes – short study pieces her music teacher insisted she practiced every day. When she was finished, she gazed up at Jessie.

“So ... do you have any ideas for saving our home yet?” asked Isa.

Jessie scowled. “Does it look like I have any ideas? Can't you tell I'm in the anger stage of grief?”

“Jess, you've got to pull it together. We need your problem-solving brains.”

Jessie put down her toothpicks and looked down the stairs. “Sorry. I'll totally have ideas when we meet up later.”

Mama walked by and ruffled Jessie's already disheveled hair. “Ideas for what?” she asked.



Jessie se ne stava appollaiata sugli scalini che portavano nella gattabuia, indossava dei jeans e una felpa blu scuro ed era circondata da pile ordinate di caramelle gommose e di stuzzicadenti. Stava costruendo un modellino molecolare ma, invece di collegare le caramelle come fossero atomi, le infilzava con gli stuzzicadenti immaginando che fossero gli occhi del Beiderman.

Isa era giù in cantina; si era sistemata in fondo alle scale in modo da poter vedere Jessie. Teneva il violino nell'incavo della spalla e passava in rassegna vari *studi*, esercitazioni brevi che, su insistenza del suo insegnante, doveva ripetere ogni giorno. Una volta finito, alzò lo sguardo verso Jessie.

«Senti ma... hai già pensato a qualcosa?»

Jessie aggrottò le sopracciglia. «Ti sembra che abbia avuto qualche idea? Non vedi che devo ancora elaborare il lutto?»

«Ti devi riprendere, Jess. Abbiamo bisogno di te, sei un genio a risolvere i problemi.»

Jessie posò lo stuzzicadenti che aveva in mano e guardò in fondo alle scale. «Scusa. Vedrai che mi verrà in mente qualche idea prima della riunione.»

La mamma oltrepassò Jessie arruffandole i capelli già spettinati. «Un'idea per cosa?» le chiese.

<p>“Oh. Uh, ideas for...” Jessie trailed off and looked down at Isa in alarm.</p> <p>“Christmas Eve dinner,” Isa lied.</p> <p>“I’m so glad you girls are taking care of that,” Mama said briskly. “And don’t worry about what everyone has been saying. I’m sure it will be great. Why don’t you look up some recipes online? I saw this one recipe for shredded Brussels sprouts with maple hickory nuts that maybe you want to try...” Mama passed Jessie her smartphone. “It’s bookmarked under <i>Recipes</i>.”</p> <p>Isa shuddered at the thought of Brussels sprouts- shredded or not – and Jessie made a face at the complexity of the recipe.</p> <p>The twins had been responsible for preparing the family meal on Tuesdays since they turned twelve earlier that year. This year, Christmas Eve fell on a Tuesday, and in the Vanderbecker tradition, Christmas Eve dinner rivaled Thanksgiving dinner in scope and quality. Oliver – not a huge believer in the twins’ cooking abilities – suggested that Jessie and Isa have immunity on Christmas Eve, or perhaps that they trade for a different, less important day. Hyacinth agreed with Oliver’s suggestion, and even Papa seemed inclined to think it was a good idea. The twins, offended by the little faith of their so-called family, insisted on keeping to the schedule and vowed to prove themselves.</p>	<p>«Oh! Eh, un’idea per ...» provò a dire Jessie guardando allarmata verso Isa.</p> <p>«Per la cena della Vigilia» mentì Isa.</p> <p>«Sono davvero contenta che quest’anno ci pensate voi, ragazze» disse sbrigativa la mamma. «E non vi preoccupate di quello che dicono gli altri. Sono sicura che sarà tutto fantastico. Perché non date un’occhiata a qualche ricetta su Internet? Ne ho trovata una per fare degli straccetti di cavoletti di Bruxelles conditi con sciroppo d’acero e noci che magari volete provare...» Passò lo smartphone a Jessie. «La trovi nella sezione <i>Ricette</i>.»</p> <p>Isa rabbrivì al pensiero dei cavoletti di Bruxelles, a straccetti o interi, e Jessie fece una smorfia vedendo quanto fosse complicata la ricetta.</p> <p>Da quando, qualche mese prima, le gemelle avevano compiuto dodici anni, erano diventate le responsabili della cena del giovedì. Quell’anno la Vigilia cadeva proprio di giovedì e, secondo la tradizione Vanderbecker, la cena doveva essere tanto buona ed abbondante quanto quella per la festa del ringraziamento. Oliver, che non era un grande sostenitore delle abilità culinarie delle gemelle, aveva proposto di dar loro un’immunità o di far cambio con un altro giorno, meno importante. Viola aveva approvato la richiesta di Oliver e anche il papà sembrava ritenerla una buona idea. Le gemelle, offese dalla poca fiducia dimostrata dalla loro suddetta famiglia, avevano insistito per restare</p>
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<p>That is, until they received the news about moving.</p> <p>“It’s going to be the worst Christmas Eve dinner if we have to move,” grumbled Isa.</p> <p>“Any ideas for what we should make? And not that Brussels sprouts thing,” Jessie added.</p> <p>Isa paused. “Anything but turkey. I’m still recovering from Thanksgiving. I will, I repeat, <i>will</i>, throw up.”</p> <p>“Okay, how about this.” Jessie set aside the octane gumdrop molecule she had started on and grabbed a piece of paper and a pen. She settled back down on the top step. “We could do roasted vegetables for the side dish. We’ve never messed those up before.” At Isa’s nod, Jessie wrote “roasted vegetables” on the list. “Okay, main dish. What about beef stew? How hard could that be?” Isa nodded again, Jessie jotted it down. “And what to conclude the meal with...” Jessie murmured to herself. She opened up the search engine on Mama’s smartphone and scrolled through some recipes on the cooking website they liked to use. She picked two under the heading <i>Easy Dessert Recipes Sure to Impress Your Guests</i>.</p> <p>“What do you think about strawberry cheesecake and carrot cake?”</p>	<p>fedeli al calendario volendo dimostrarsi all’altezza.</p> <p>Questo fino a quando, quella mattina, non avevano ricevuto la notizia del trasferimento.</p> <p>«Sarà la Vigilia di Natale più brutta in assoluto se dobbiamo anche trasferirci» bofonchiò Isa.</p> <p>«Qualche idea su cosa preparare? Lasciando stare i cavoletti» chiese Jessie.</p> <p>Isa fece una pausa e disse: «Tutto ma non il tacchino. Mi devo ancora riprendere dal ringraziamento. Questa volta potrei vomitare per davvero!»</p> <p>«Okay, che ne dici di questo» Jessie posò di lato la gommosa molecola di ottano che stava assemblando, afferrò un foglio di carta, una penna e si sistemò sull’ultimo gradino.</p> <p>«Potremmo fare delle verdure arrosto come contorno. Ci sono sempre venute bene per ora.» Isa annuì e Jessie scrisse “verdure arrosto” sul foglio. «Okay, adesso il piatto principale. Che ne pensi di uno spezzatino di manzo? Non credo sia difficile». Isa annuì di nuovo e Jessie aggiunse velocemente anche quello alla lista.</p> <p>«E come dolce...» disse Jessie mormorando tra sé e sé. Prese il cellulare della mamma, entrò su Internet scorrendo varie ricette sui loro siti di cucina preferiti e ne scelse due sotto la scritta <i>Dessert facili dal successo assicurato</i>.</p> <p>«Che ne dici di una cheesecake alle fragole e una torta di carote?»</p>
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<p>“Great,” Isa said. “Add fresh bread from Castleman’s Bakery too.” Isa started a new etude, making a number of mistakes along the way.</p> <p>“Okay.” Jessie wrote the final menu on the sheet of paper.</p> <p>The twins went on to the guest list. “Miss Josie and Mr. Jeet, of course,” Isa said. “Oh man, what will <i>they</i> do if we move?” Miss Josie and Mr. Jeet had lived in the apartment above theirs for as long as anyone could remember. Retired, they spent a lot of time with the Vanderbeekers, and Mama and Papa helped them with grocery shopping and keeping track of their doctors’ appointments and medicines.</p> <p>“I don’t think Laney and Hyacinth will be able to leave them,” Jessie said. “Laney will latch herself on to Mr. Jeet’s leg and refuse to let go.”</p> <p>Jessie continued with the guest list, which grew to include the children’s favorite relatives, Auntie Harrigan and Uncle Arthur, who lived in Westchester, as well as Isa’s music teacher, Mr. Van Hooten.</p> <p>“Wouldn’t it be amazing if we could get the Beiderman to come?” Isa mused.</p> <p>“If the Beiderman ends up at our dinner table, it will be a Christmas miracle,” replied Jessie.</p> <p>Isa shrugged, then began playing “Csárdás” by Vittorio Monti, moving through to the end of the piece and striking the last note with a flourish of her bow. A familiar scuffling was heard outside.</p>	<p>«Perfetto» disse Isa. «Scrivi anche del pane fresco dal forno dei Castelman.»</p> <p>«Okay» rispose Jessie ricopiando il menu finale su un altro foglio.</p> <p>Le gemelle passarono alla lista degli invitati. «Sicuramente la signora Josie e il signor Jeet» disse Isa. «Accidenti, e <i>loro</i> come faranno se ci trasferiamo?» La signora Josie e il signor Jeet vivevano nell’appartamento sopra di loro ed essendo in pensione passavano molto tempo con i Vanderbeeker. La mamma e il papà li aiutavano a fare la spesa e a ricordarsi delle visite mediche e delle medicine.</p> <p>«Non credo che Sofie e Viola riusciranno a lasciarli.» disse Jessie. «Sofie si attaccherà di certo alla gamba del signor Jeet senza lasciarla andare». Poi, continuò con la lista aggiungendo i loro parenti preferiti, la zia Harrigan e lo zio Arthur che vivevano più a nord, nella zona di Westchester, e l’insegnante di musica di Isa, il signor Van Hooten.</p> <p>«Non sarebbe fantastico se riuscissimo a far venire anche il Beiderman?» pensò Isa ad alta voce.</p> <p>«Sarebbe proprio un miracolo di Natale» commentò Jessie.</p> <p>Isa scrollò le spalle e suonò tutta la “Czardas” di Vittorio Monti, sottolineando l’ultima nota con un movimento più ampio dell’arco.</p> <p>Dall’esterno giunse uno stropiccio di piedi familiare; poi la porta si aprì e il papà ruzzolò dentro l’appartamento.</p>
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<p>The door to the apartment burst open and in tumbles their dad.</p> <p>Papa took off his coat and hung it up next to the door, then walked across the kitchen to the basement door. “Brava!” he called down to Isa. “A perfect rendition of ‘Csárdás’! Excellent emotional interpretation! Amazing dynamics!”</p> <p>“Oh, Papa.” Isa rolled her eyes. “That was the worst!”</p> <p>“But each time is new, my little violinist. You’ve never played exactly that way, right? The beauty of live music!” he flicked a nickel down the staircase, where it bounced off some steps and landed in Isa’s violin case, then he scooped up Laney and placed her on top of his shoulders. “Has anyone seen my Laney-Bean? I’ve been looking all over for her!”</p> <p>“I’m not Laney-Bean. I’m Panda-Laney!” the white-swathed wonder called from above.</p> <p>“Ah, Panda-Laney! My favorite type of panda! Let me see, I don’t remember... Are Panda-Laneys... ticklish?” Laney collapsed in a torrent of giggles, and Papa swung her off his shoulders and to the ground.</p> <p>Laney wrapped her arms and legs around his left leg and held on for dear life. Papa half dragged her to where his wife was mixing batter for cheesy bread. The soup pot bubbled on the stove, the fragrant smell of herbs and vegetables drifting through the kitchen.</p>	<p>Dopo essersi tolto il cappello e averlo appeso vicino alla porta, attraversò la cucina arrivando alla porta della cantina. «<i>Bravo!</i>» urlò a Isa. «Un’ esecuzione perfetta della “Czardas”! Interpretazione superba e dinamica eccellente!»</p> <p>«Ma papà» disse Isa alzando gli occhi al cielo. «È stata la peggiore!»</p> <p>«Ogni volta è diversa, mia piccola violinista. Non l’hai mai suonata proprio come adesso, no? È il bello della musica dal vivo!» le rispose il papà lanciando una monetina da cinque centesimi giù per le scale dove rimbalzò per qualche gradino andando a finire nella custodia del violino. Dopo di che sollevò Sofie e se la mise sulle spalle. «Qualcuno ha visto il mio Sofficino? L’ho cercata dappertutto!»</p> <p>«Non mi chiamo Sofficino. Sono Sofie-Panda!» si sentì urlare da sotto la pelliccia bianca.</p> <p>«Giusto, Sofie-Panda! Il mio tipo di panda preferito! Vediamo un po’, non ricordo ... i Sofie-Panda ... soffrono il solletico?» Sofie iniziò a ridere come una pazza. Il papà la sollevò dalle spalle per poggiarla a terra e la bambina gli si aggrappò stretta alle gambe costringendolo a trascinarsela dietro mentre raggiungeva la moglie, intenta a mescolare il composto per il pane al formaggio. Intanto, sul fornello, la zuppa sobbolliva in pentola e un</p>
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“Hello, beautiful lady,” he said, dropping a kiss next to her ear.

Mama looked him over. Papa still wore his superintendent “uniform,” an outfit of his own choosing that he insisted on wearing whenever he did building duties. “On the bright side,” Mama said, “if we move, you won’t have to wear that jumpsuit anymore.”

“For your information,” Papa said, both of his index fingers pointing down at his uniform, “these are *coveralls*. Only the coolest supers wear them.”

“I want coveralls too,” Laney said from the ground, where she still hung on to Papa’s leg.

“See?” Papa said to Mama. “Our daughter has excellent taste.”

“I just don’t see why you can’t wear your normal clothes to take out the trash,” Mama said, pouring the bread batter into two greased loaf pans.

“Honey, I can’t wear my *computer* clothes when I do stuff around the building. The computer clothes don’t have the let’s-get-dirty-and-fix-things personality that my coveralls do.”

Mama sighed.

Papa scanned the living room and took in the funeral atmosphere. Isa played a mournful tune on her violin, and the brownstone was devoid of

profumino delizioso di verdure e piante aromatiche inondava la cucina.

«Buonasera mia bellissima ragazza» le sussurrò posandole un bacio vicino all’orecchio.

La mamma si girò a guardarlo e vide che indossava di nuovo l’“uniforme” da tuttofare che si era scelto da solo e che insisteva a mettere ogni volta che doveva fare dei lavoretti nel condominio. «Vediamo il lato positivo» disse la mamma. «Se ci trasferiamo almeno non dovrai più indossare quella salopette.»

«Per tua informazione» le rispose il papà indicando l’uniforme con entrambi gli indici, «questa è una tuta da lavoro e solo i più strafighi la possono indossare.»

«Anch’io ne voglio una» disse Sofie ancora attaccata alla gamba del papà.

«Vedi?» disse il papà alla mamma. «Nostra figlia ha davvero buon gusto.»

«Non capisco perché non puoi indossare i tuoi soliti vestiti per andare a buttare la spazzatura» rispose la mamma versando il composto su due fettone di pane imburrate.

«Tesoro, non posso mica indossare gli stessi vestiti che uso per riparare i computer quando mi occupo del condominio. Con quelli non mi sento autorizzato a sporcarmi se devo riparare qualcosa.»

La mamma sospirò.

Gli occhi del papà passarono in rassegna il salotto registrando subito l’atmosfera da

the bustle and laughter typical of the Vanderbecker household. His voice lowered.

“They’re not taking the move well, are they?”

Mama looked into Papa’s eyes. “No matter what happens,” she said, touching his cheek, “I’m grateful for the past six years here.” She paused. “Even if you did have to wear coveralls.”

Papa’s smile didn’t change the melancholy in his eyes as he reached up to put his hand over hers. “Life here couldn’t have been better.”

Four

After Oliver’s conversation with Jimmy L, he came back inside, swiped three of the double chocolate pecan cookies Mama had baked earlier, then retreated to his bedroom for some Beiderman brainstorming time.

Being the only boy among four sisters was not easy, but there was one perk: Oliver was the only one in the family who had a room to himself. Indeed, it was a tiny walk-in-closet-turned-bedroom, just big enough to hold his loft bed and a narrow desk underneath it.

Five years ago, Uncle Arthur arrived announced wearing a tool belt and armed with a

funerale. Isa stava suonando una melodia tristissima e le mura dell’edificio non rimbombavano dal chiasso e le risate tipici dei Vanderbecker. Abbassò la voce e chiese alla moglie: «Non l’hanno presa bene, vero?»

La mamma lo guardò e gli accarezzò una guancia. «Non importa quello sta succedendo, sono contenta di aver trascorso qui gli ultimi sei anni.» Poi, fece una pausa e aggiunse: «Nonostante la salopette.»

Il papà sorrise mentre allungava la mano per coprire quella della moglie ma non riuscì a nascondere un’espressione malinconica. «Vivere qui è stato fantastico.»

Quattro

Dopo aver parlato con Jimmy, Oliver rientrò in casa, rubò tre cookies al doppio cioccolato e noci che la mamma aveva appena sfornato e si ritirò nella sua stanza per raccogliere un po’ di idee sulla questione Beiderman.

Non era facile essere l’unico maschio tra quattro sorelle ma almeno aveva una stanza tutta per sé, e questo era un beneficio. Anche se in realtà si trattava di un ex ripostiglio, grande abbastanza da contenere un letto a soppalco con sotto una piccola scrivania.

Cinque anni prima lo zio Arthur si era presentato all’improvviso a casa loro armato di

power drill. Uncle Arthur declared that if Oliver was to survive being the only boy among many sisters, he needed two things: an imagination and a place of his own to escape to. His uncle proceeded to install bookshelves on every inch of available open wall space in the room while Papa looked on in wonder at the blur of construction. From that day on, Uncle Arthur sent Oliver books on a monthly basis – books about superheroes and Greek mythology and pirates and space exploration and presidents. Now walking into Oliver’s room was like entering a miniature library that someone happened to live in.

An hour later, Oliver had done zero brainstorming. Rather, he was so deep into his book, Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Treasure Island*, that he didn’t hear Mama calling him to dinner. He was Jim Hawkins, struggling to board the ship after cutting the anchor loose, only to be confronted by the wicked pirate Israel Hands – “OLIVER!” his sisters yelled, crashing into his sacred, quiet bedroom.

Oliver jumped at the intrusion before realizing that one, he was not Jim Hawkins, and two, he was not on a pirate ship. He lifted the book right in front of his face. “Lave. Me. Alone.”

Laney bunny-hopped over to Oliver and threw her arms around him. “I love you, Ollie,” she

trapano e cinturone degli attrezzi affermando che se Oliver doveva sopravvivere da solo con quattro sorelle aveva bisogno di due cose: tanta immaginazione e un posto tutto per sé dove potersi rifugiare. Così si era messo all’opera e aveva montato delle mensole in tutti gli spazi vuoti del muro mentre il papà lo guardava, sbalordito da tutto quel lavorio. Poi, ogni mese, lo zio Arthur aveva cominciato a mandare al nipote libri che parlavano di supereroi, di mitologia greca, di pirati, di missioni spaziali e di presidenti. Adesso entrando in camera di Oliver si aveva l’impressione di entrare in una biblioteca in miniatura, abitata da qualcuno.

Era passata un’ora da quando Oliver si era ritirato in camera e non aveva ancora pensato a niente; era così preso dal suo libro, *L’isola del tesoro* di Robert Louis Stevenson, che non si era accorto della mamma che lo chiamava per la cena. Nei panni di Jim Hawkins, era riuscito ad ancorare la nave e si era ritrovato ad affrontare il malvagio pirata Israel Hands.

«OLIVER!» urlarono le sorelle irrompendo nella sacra quiete della sua stanza.

Il bambino sobbalzò per l’intrusione realizzando che uno, non era Jim Hawkins, e due, non si trovava su una nave di pirati. Sollevò il libro per coprire la faccia e disse: «Lasciatemi... in... pace.»

Sofie gli balzò addosso, agile come un coniglio, e gli gettò le braccia al collo. «Ti voglio bene, Ollie» disse piantandogli quattro

<p>declared, planting four wet kisses on his cheeks. “Time for dinner!”</p> <p>“Ugh,” Oliver said, scrubbing his cheek with his sleeve. “Long John Silver would maroon you for such despicable behavior.”</p> <p>Laney grabbed Oliver’s hand and tried to yank him to his feet, budging him not one bit. She did, however, manage to trip over his left knee and knock down a pile of comic books stacked by his desk.</p> <p>Laney emerged from the comic-book avalanche still gripping Oliver’s hand. “Come on! Dinnertime! Mama made <i>cheesy bread</i>.”</p> <p>Oliver’s stomach rumbled, the double chocolate pecan cookies he’d eaten an hour earlier a distant memory. Despite the lure of piracy, he decided that dinner would be a good idea. Together the Vanderbeeker children clambered down the steps to the kitchen, all talking at once.</p> <p>“Ah, the sound of my graceful children coming down the stairs. Delightful,” Papa called from the kitchen.</p> <p>Mama turned toward her children and pointed a canary-yellow spatula with a glob of meringue cream at them. “Attention! I need this table set, <i>pronto!</i>” The meringue cream dripped off the spatula and splattered on the floor, right next to</p>	<p>baci umidicci sulla guancia. «È pronta la cena!»</p> <p>«Che schifo» disse Oliver, asciugandosi la guancia con la manica. «Long John Silver ti abbandonerebbe su un’isola deserta per un comportamento così disdicevole.»</p> <p>Sofie lo afferrò per la mano e cercò di tirarlo su in piedi. Non riuscì a muoverlo di un millimetro; in compenso, inciampò contro il ginocchio sinistro del fratello andando a sbattere contro una pila di fumetti accatastati al lato della scrivania.</p> <p>Quando riemerse dalla valanga di fumetti Sofie era ancora aggrappata alla mano di Oliver. «Dai! È pronta la cena! La mamma ha fatto il <i>pane al formaggio!</i>»</p> <p>Lo stomaco di Oliver protestò rumorosamente; i cookies al doppio cioccolato e noci che aveva mangiato un’ora prima erano ormai un ricordo lontano. Il richiamo all’avventura era forte ma dovette ammettere che la cena era una buona idea e seguì le sorelle in cucina.</p> <p>«Ecco il dolce suono dei miei figli che scendono le scale. Meraviglioso» urlò il papà dalla cucina sentendoli scendere parlando l’uno sopra l’altro.</p> <p>La mamma si girò verso i figli e minacciandoli con una spatola giallo canarino ricoperta di crema alla vaniglia disse: «Attenzione! Mi serve la tavola apparecchiata, <i>andale!</i>» La crema si staccò dalla spatola</p>
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Franz, who was lurking around the kitchen hoping for such a miracle.

The kids rushed around, banging drawers and drop-ping utensils. Finally the table was set, food was placed in the middle, and people were seated. Then Oliver got up because he wanted ice cream in his water. Then Laney insisted on rummaging through the silverware drawer for her special soup spoon. When everyone was seated again, the family held hands, Papa said a quick blessing over the food, and dinner began.

“So,” Oliver said, jumping right into the very topic at the forefront of everyone’s minds. “I don’t know about you, but I’m feeling like we need to *see* the Beiderman. You know, before we move.” He looked at his parents with his “innocent” face.

Papa glanced at Mama. “He’s trying to look innocent. Something’s up.”
Mama sighed and looked at Oliver. “What are you planning to do to that poor man?”

“What? Nothing! Why is everyone looking at me like that?” Oliver reached over the table and riffled through the slices of cheesy bread, searching for the biggest piece. “I’m just saying, the Beiderman should be a man and show his face to us at least one time before he evicts us. We need an *explanation!*”

spiaccicandosi sul pavimento, proprio accanto a Franz, appostato in cucina in attesa di un miracolo come quello.

I bambini incominciarono a correre in qua e in là e, tra cassette che sbattevano e utensili che cadevano, la tavola venne apparecchiata, il cibo venne sistemato al centro e tutti si sedettero. Prima Oliver si alzò per prendere del ghiaccio da mettere nell’acqua. Poi Sofie non la smetteva di rovistare nel cassetto delle posate cercando il suo cucchiaino preferito. Quando tutti furono di nuovo seduti, si presero per mano, il papà ringraziò velocemente per il pasto e la cena iniziò.

«Allora» disse Oliver, toccando subito l’argomento che frullava in testa a tutti. «Non so voi, ma credo che dovremmo *vedere* il Beiderman. Prima di andarcene intendo» Guardò i genitori con finta innocenza.

Il papà si voltò verso la mamma «Cerca di fare l’innocente. C’è qualcosa sotto.»

La mamma sospirò e guardò Oliver «Cosa hai intenzione di fare a quel pover’uomo?»

«Cosa? Niente! Perché mi guardate tutti così?» disse allungandosi per frugare tra i crostoni in cerca di quello più grande. «Dico solo che il Beiderman dovrebbe comportarsi da uomo e venire a guardarci in faccia almeno una volta prima di buttarci fuori. Abbiamo diritto a una spiegazione!»

<p>“It’s <i>Mr.</i> Beiderman, and he’s not evicting us. He’s not renewing our lease,” Mama said.</p> <p>Isa spoke up. “I’ve always wondered what he looks like. Is he short? Tall? What color hair does he have?”</p> <p>“What type of things is he interested in?” Jessie chimed in.</p> <p>“Does he like cute little bunnies?” asked Laney, bits of cheesy bread escaping from her mouth.</p> <p>“What about Christmas carols? Or, do you know if he’s Jewish?” asked Oliver. For that, he got a kick under the table from two different sources. Based on the synchronicity and the force of the kicks, he was pretty sure they came from the twins.</p> <p>“I know absolutely nothing about him,” Mama said. “You know how private he is.”</p> <p>“Every time I’ve had to go into his apartment,” Papa said, “he tells me to let myself in with my super key and closes himself into his bedroom until I’m done.”</p> <p>“You have a <i>super key</i>?” said Laney, amazed. “Does it have powers? Is it magic?”</p> <p>“He means the <i>superintendent</i> key,” Oliver said, rolling his eyes.</p> <p>“I think this whole situation is weird,” Jessie said, banging her soup spoon on the table. “We’ve lived here for six years and haven’t seen him once. Then he kicks us out of our home without even getting to know us?”</p>	<p>«È <i>signor</i> Beiderman. E non ci sta buttando fuori casa, semplicemente non ci rinnova il contratto» disse la mamma.</p> <p>«Mi sono sempre chiesta che aspetto abbia. È basso o alto? Di che colore sono i suoi capelli?» si intromise Isa.</p> <p>«Quali sono i suoi interessi?» aggiunse Jessie.</p> <p>«Gli piacciono i coniglietti?» chiese Sofie, mentre pezzettini di crostone le scappavano fuori dalla bocca.</p> <p>«O le canzoni di Natale? Sapete se è ebreo?» chiese Oliver ricevendo un calcio sotto al tavolo da due direzioni diverse. A giudicare dalla sincronicità e dalla forza dei colpi, era quasi certo che fossero state le gemelle.</p> <p>«Non so assolutamente niente di lui» rispose la mamma. «Sapete anche voi quanto è riservato».</p> <p>«Tutte le volte che devo andare nel suo appartamento» disse il papà «devo usare la mia chiave universale per entrare e lui si chiude in camera fino a che non ho finito».</p> <p>«Hai una chiave <i>universale</i>?» chiese Sofie. «Ha dei poteri? Va nello spazio?»</p> <p>«È la chiave del custode, quella che apre <i>tutte</i> le porte» le rispose Oliver alzando gli occhi al cielo.</p> <p>«Secondo me tutta questa faccenda è strana» disse Jessie sbattendo il cucchiaio sul tavolo. «Viviamo qua da sei anni e non lo abbiamo visto nemmeno una volta. Poi ci butta fuori casa senza nemmeno conoscerci?»</p>
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<p>“Mr. Jones said he used to work at City College before we moved in,” Hyacinth said.</p> <p>Mama cleared her throat, then said the words no one wanted to hear. “We need to start packing tomorrow.”</p> <p>Around the table each Vanderbeeker finished dinner, but the food tasted like dust and left them empty and unsatisfied. After clearing the table and loading the dishwasher, the kids headed upstairs as the brownstone creaked mournfully in the silence.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">○○○</p>	<p>«Il signor Jones ha detto che prima che ci trasferissimo qui lavorava al City College» disse Viola.</p> <p>La mamma si schiarì la gola, poi disse le parole che nessuno voleva sentire. «Domani dobbiamo iniziare a preparare gli scatoloni».</p> <p>Uno di fianco all’altro, i Vanderbeeker finirono di mangiare; ma il cibo aveva lo stesso sapore della polvere e li lasciò vuoti e insoddisfatti. Dopo aver sparecchiato la tavola e aver caricato la lavastoviglie, i bambini salirono mentre lo scricchiolio triste dell’edificio riempiva il silenzio.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">○○○</p>
<p>“Off to the REP?” asked Isa.</p> <p>“Desperate times call for desperate measures,” replied Jessie.</p> <p>Isa opened her closet door, pulled out an armload of hoodies, and passed them out. While everyone zipped up the thick sweatshirts, Jessie gathered the REP bag, a duffel that was filled with fleece blankets along with a large two-liter bottle that used to hold soda water but was now filled with tap water. With what Oliver believed was superhuman strength, he yanked up the twins’ bedroom window and the kids climbed out onto the fire escape. Isa hitched Laney on her back and started up the groaning metal stairs to the REP, otherwise known as the Roof of Epic Proportions.</p>	<p>«Andiamo sul TED?» chiese Isa.</p> <p>«Momenti disperati richiedono misure disperate» rispose Jessie.</p> <p>Isa aprì la porta del guardaroba, agguantò le felpe e le passò agli altri. Mentre i fratelli finivano di prepararsi, Jessie agguantò il borsone che si portavano sempre sul tetto, pieno di coperte di pile e con un bottiglione da due litri, dove di solito mettevano la soda ma che adesso conteneva acqua di rubinetto. Grazie a quella che riteneva essere una forza sovrumana, Oliver riuscì a spingere verso l’alto il vetro della finestra che, una volta aperta, permetteva di arrampicarsi sulla scala antincendio. Sofie montò in groppa a Isa che</p>

There were two ways to get up to the REP, but the other way required the Vanderbeeker kids to use the ladder directly across from the Beiderman's door. They had never used that roof entrance, for obvious reasons.

"Be careful," Isa reminded them. She said that same thing, in her listen-to-me-or-else tone, every time they went to the roof. First, Isa and Laney passed Miss Josie and Mr. Jeet's living room. ("Hi, Miss Josie!" Laney chirped, tapping the window and waving when Miss Josie looked up from her television show.) Next, they crept past the Beiderman's windows, which were covered by blackout curtains. Finally, they emerged onto the roof.

The roof floor was not the typical concrete, sandpapery surface that covered most roofs in New York City. Right before the Vanderbeekers arrived, the one-hundred-year-old roof was replaced and then topped off with currant-colored ceramics tiles. The tiles made the roof welcoming and soundproof. Nevertheless, the kids knew to trade in the same manner they did when visiting one another's bedrooms late at night, being care not to wake their parents. They were certain the Beiderman could not hear them, because he would definitely have said

iniziò a salire lungo le cigolanti scale di metallo che portavano fino al TED, il Tetto dalle Epiche Dimensioni.

C'erano due modi per accedervi, ma uno richiedeva di usare le scale che passavano direttamente davanti alla porta del Beiderman e, per ovvie ragioni, nessuno di loro lo avevano mai tentato.

«State attenti» ricordò Isa con il suo tono "ascoltate me o sono guai!", ripetendo quello che diceva ogni volta che salivano sul tetto. Passarono prima davanti al salotto della signorina Josie e del signor Jeet. («Salve signora Rosie!» cinguettò Sofie dando qualche colpettino alla finestra e salutando la signora Rosie che alzò lo sguardo dalla televisione). Poi, sgattaiolarono veloci oltrepassando le finestre del Beiderman coperte da tende oscuranti. Infine, arrivarono sul tetto.

La superficie del tetto non era né liscia né di cemento come quelle che ricoprono la maggior parte dei tetti di New York. Poco prima del loro trasferimento nell'edificio, il tetto, vecchio di centouno anni, era stato smantellato e ricoperto con delle nuove tegole, in ceramica dal colore rosso-ribes, che lo rendevano accogliente e insonorizzato. I bambini preferivano comunque muoversi alla stessa di maniera di quando si spostavano da una camera all'altra durante la notte, stando attenti a non svegliare i genitori. Erano certi che il

<p>something about it. And not in a nice way, either.</p> <p>“Water wall to launch, with your permission,” Jessie said to Isa when she got to the roof, lifting the water bottle out of the REP bag and holding it up. The sky glowed a Persian blue, and the black silhouettes of the buildings gave the neighborhood a fantasy quality, like the chimney-sweep scene in the <i>Mary Poppins</i> movie.</p> <p>“Go for it, boss,” Isa replied, taking the REP bag from Jessie and setting the blankets out on the ground.</p> <p>Jessie had built the water wall along the eastern façade of the brownstone, inspired by a science class during which her teacher showed them different cartoons of Rube Goldberg machines. The one Jessie loved the most was the cartoon demonstrating a sheet music turner. A guy who looked like a young Beethoven was sitting at a music stand, where he was pumping a foot pedal that set off a bunch of reactions, like starting a bike pump that puffed air into a boxing glove that punched a lever that cause a stick to shoot out and turn the page on the music stand. This comic gave Jessie an excellent idea for something to make for Isa, and when she couldn't get the sheet music turner to work, she created the water wall instead. It ended up being a present for Isa's twelfth birthday, and Jessie had spent nearly all of June working on it.</p>	<p>Beiderman non li sentisse, perché sennò lo avrebbe già fatto sapere e in malo modo.</p> <p>«Parete d'acqua in arrivo, con il tuo permesso» disse Jessie a Isa quando, una volta sul tetto, alzò in alto la bottiglia dell'acqua che aveva appena tirato fuori dal borsone. Il cielo di un brillante blu indaco e i profili neri degli edifici davano un aspetto di fiaba al quartiere; sembrava di essere tra gli spazzacamini del film di <i>Mary Poppins</i>.</p> <p>«Dacci dentro capo!» rispose Isa, prendendole di mano il borsone per sistemare le coperte sul pavimento.</p> <p>Jessie aveva costruito il muro d'acqua lungo la facciata dell'edificio che dava a est, ispirandosi a una lezione di scienze dove l'insegnante aveva mostrato alla classe alcune caricature disegnate da Rube Golberg, dove c'erano delle macchine estremamente complicate. Il disegno che le era piaciuto di più era quello con uno spartito musicale che girava le pagine. Un tizio, che ricordava un promettente Beethoven, stava seduto davanti a uno spartito e premeva con il piede su un pedale che dava il via a una serie di reazioni: metteva in moto una pompa per bici che soffiava aria in un guantone da box che colpiva una leva che faceva sollevare un bastoncino che girava la pagina dello spartito. Quella buffa scena aveva dato a Jessie un'idea meravigliosa per fare qualcosa per Isa; e quando non era riuscita a far funzionare lo spartito meccanico</p>
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Jessie brought her water bottle over the east side of the brownstone, where an industrial metal funnel rested on the roof ledge. Jessie carefully positioned the water bottle in the wire cage, aimed the spout into the base of the funnel, then unscrewed the bottle cap. The water flowed into the funnel, where it descended through the black hose and settled into a metal container secured to the edge of the building. It then trickled along chutes that zigzagged along the side of the building, causing a series of water wheels with spokes to ping three sets of miniature wind chimes as they rotated.

Next, the water set off a lever attached to a wooden rain stick, nudging the rain stick to sway back and forth like a lazy seesaw. The water then came to a drop-off, where it waterfalled one story down to a rounded piece of tin that Jessie had found on the curb coming home from school one day. The tin was magic; it vibrated and produced a different sound depending on what angle the water hit it. Then the water rolled off right into Mama's herb garden and kept the plants hydrated during the growing season, which was probably the only reason she had let Jessie construct the water wall in the first place.

aveva deciso di creare una parete d'acqua. Alla fine Jessie ci aveva messo quasi tutto giugno per realizzarlo e il progetto era diventato il regalo per i dodici anni della gemella.

Jessie si diresse verso il lato del tetto che dava a est, dove un imbuto metallico era stato posizionato sul parapetto del tetto. Facendo attenzione, avvolse la bottiglia nel filo metallico così da fissarla alla base dell'imbuto e aprì il tappo. L'acqua incominciò a scorrere e scese attraverso un tubo corrugato nero per finire in un contenitore metallico fissato sull'edificio. Da lì continuò a scorrere grazie a varie pendenze che zigzagavano lungo la parete facendo girare una serie di ruote idrauliche che muovevano tre piccole campane a vento.

Continuando la discesa azionò una leva attaccata a un bastone della pioggia che, spinto leggermente, iniziò a dondolare avanti e indietro come un'altalena annoiata. Poi, all'altezza del piano terra, la sua discesa si assestò bruscamente e si riversò a cascata all'interno di un pezzo di latta rotondo che un giorno Jessie aveva trovato sul marciapiede tornando da scuola. La latta era magica e, vibrando, produceva un suono che cambiava a seconda del punto colpito dall'acqua. Da ultimo, le gocce d'acqua rotolarono e andarono a finire precisamente sulle erbe aromatiche della mamma che così rimanevano ben idratate durante la stagione di crescita; e questo era il motivo principale per cui la mamma aveva

A two-liter bottle of water was enough to keep the water wall's music going for about fifteen minutes. The sound from the water wall was what Isa imagined a wind quartet would sound like if the musicians played on a grassy field on a rainy day (with umbrellas to protect the instruments, of course). Isa had been speechless when Jessie unveiled it on their birthday. Jessie had shrugged and said, "It's just physics, no big deal." The music was loud enough for the Vanderbecker to hear from the room but quiet enough to penetrate the Beiderman's soundproof windows.

With the water wall singing, the Vanderbeekers gathered at the south side of the brownstone, leaning their elbows along the ledge (except Laney, who could only rest her fingertips on the ledge and had to be picked up by Isa so she could see over the wall). The south view was the best. From there they could see the rows of buildings up and down the block. In the distance, City College was lit up on the hill, looking like an ancient castle complete with turrets.

"Let's play 'listen without paying attention,'" suggested Laney. This was one of her favorite games – she had made it up herself – and it didn't make sense to the rest of the kids until they were

permeso a Jessie di costruire la parete d'acqua.

Una bottiglia di due litri bastava per far suonare la parete per circa quindici minuti. Isa immaginava quel suono come quello che poteva produrre un quartetto d'archi che suonava sull'erba in un giorno di pioggia (con degli ombrelli a proteggere gli strumenti ovviamente). Isa era rimasta senza parole quando Jessie glielo aveva mostrato alzando le spalle aveva detto: «È solo fisica, niente di straordinario». La musica era abbastanza forte da riuscire a sentirla dal tetto ma abbastanza leggera da non penetrare le finestre insonorizzate del Beiderman.

Con la musica dell'acqua di sottofondo, i bambini si riunirono sul lato dell'edificio che dava verso sud, appoggiando i gomiti sul parapetto (tranne Sofie, che riusciva solamente ad appoggiare le dita e doveva essere sollevata da Isa per riuscire a vedere al di là del muretto). La vista, in quella direzione, era la migliore; si potevano vedere le file di edifici che riempivano il quartiere e, in lontananza, il City College illuminato sulla collinetta, che ricordava un vecchio castello completo di torrette.

«Giochiamo a "sentire senza fare attenzione"» propose Sofie. Era uno dei suoi giochi preferiti, l'aveva inventato lei e per gli altri non aveva alcun senso, almeno fino a quando non si mettevano a giocare. Allora tutto tornava.

in the middle of the game. Then it made perfect sense.

“Close your eyes,” instructed Laney.

A few moments later, Hyacinth heard the sounds of a merengue music coming from one of the apartments down the block. Oliver heard a sliding door opening and their next-door neighbor click a lighter from a group of people walking down the street on the side of the building. Isa heard the rein stick’s pebble shift back and forth on the water wall. Laney, whose eyes were squeezed as tight as she could squeezed them, tried not to hear anything. Still, she heard Miss Josie’s rich voice singing a gospel tune. It was amazing what the Vanderbeekers could hear when trying to listen anything.

Hyacinth’s voice interrupted the not-listening.

“Do you think we’ll really stay in Harlem?”

“Of course,” scoffed Jessie, opening her eyes.

“Papa said so.”

Hyacinth shook her head. “You know, he never really *said* we’d stay. And he looked sort of weird when he was talking about it. He had that same look he gets when he tells Grandma he loves that yucky anchovy casserole she always makes when she comes here.”

“Papa has lived here all his life,” Oliver said.

“He’s like the mayor of our block. He’d never leave.”

“And his computer repair job is here,” Jessie pointed out. “He said he would hire me as his

«Chiudete gli occhi» ordinò Sofie.

Qualche istante dopo, Viola sentì delle note di merengue arrivare da uno degli appartamenti del quartiere. Oliver sentì una porta scorrevole aprirsi e il vicino che si accendeva una sigaretta. Jessie sentì la risata sguaiata di un gruppo di persone che camminavano in strada dalla parte opposta dell’edificio. Isa sentì le pietruzze del bastone della pioggia che scivolavano da un’estremità all’altra dello strumento. Sofie che strizzava gli occhi il più stretto possibile provò a non ascoltare niente. Ma non riuscì a non sentire la calda voce della signorina Josie che intonava una canzone gospel. Quante cose riuscivano a sentire quando cercavano di non ascoltare niente.

Viola interruppe il gioco. «Pensate che rimarremo davvero ad Harlem?»

«Sicuro» le rispose Jessie con tono da saputella aprendo gli occhi «L’ha detto papà».

Viola scosse la testa: «In realtà, non l’ha mai detto. E quando ne parlava aveva la stessa strana espressione di quando dice alla nonna che gli piace quel disgustoso sformato di acciughe che ci porta sempre quando viene a trovarci.»

«Papà ha sempre vissuto qui» disse Oliver

«È come un sindaco per il quartiere e non lo lascerà mai».

«E lavora qui. Poi ha promesso di prendermi come assistente quando avrò compiuto sedici anni» aggiunse Jessie. Fece

<p>assistant when I turn sixteen.” Jessie paused for a nanosecond. “Only one thousand, two hundred and fifty-seven days to go.”</p> <p>“Papa doesn’t lie,” Laney said. “Lying is bad news.”</p> <p>“I agree, Laney.” Isa looked out at the neighborhood. “This is my favorite view ever,” she said.</p> <p>“Do you think the Beiderman worked at the castle?” Hyacinth asked, looking at the City College. “I thought only nice people were allowed to work in the castle.”</p> <p>“Princesses live there,” Laney stated, bracing her arm’s on Isa shoulders so she could get a better view.</p> <p>“Princesses <i>do not</i> live there,” Oliver said. “That’s a college, dummy.”</p> <p>“Don’t call your sister ‘dummy,’” Hyacinth and Isa said in unison.</p> <p>“Come on,” Isa said. “We have work to do.” She led her siblings to the blankets, where they set down for the second meeting of Operation Beiderman. Hyacinth handed on the buttons she’d made, and her siblings attached them to their hoodies.</p> <p>“Remember, not a word with Mama and Papa,” Jessie reminded them. The Vanderbeeker kids formed a tight circle and did a communal fist bump.</p> <p>“What if we fail?” asked Hyacinth.</p> <p>“We won’t,” Oliver said, pulling out a startlingly realistic pirate sword that was</p>	<p>una pausa di un nanosecondo, continuò.</p> <p>«Mancano solo mille e duecento cinquantasette giorni».</p> <p>«Papà non dice mai le bugie» disse Sofie</p> <p>«Portano solo guai.»</p> <p>«Hai ragione, Sofie» disse Isa gettando un’occhiata al vicinato «Questa è davvero la mia vista preferita».</p> <p>«Secondo voi il Beiderman lavorava davvero al castello?» chiese Viola guardando il City College. «Credevo che solo le persone gentili ci potessero lavorare».</p> <p>«Là ci vivono le principesse» affermò Sofie stringendo le braccia intorno alle spalle di Isa così da avere una visuale migliore.</p> <p>«Le principesse non vivono là. È un college scemotta» disse Oliver.</p> <p>«Non chiamarla scemotta» gli dissero Viola e Isa all’unisono.</p> <p>«Su. Abbiamo del lavoro da sbrigare» disse Isa incoraggiando gli altri a sedersi sulle coperte per dare inizio alla seconda riunione dell’operazione Beiderman. Viola distribuì le spille che aveva realizzato e tutti se le attaccarono sulle felpe.</p> <p>«Ricordatevi. Non una parola con mamma e papà» ricordò Jessie. Si strinsero tutti in cerchio e allungarono le braccia per battere pugno contro pugno.</p> <p>«E se falliamo?» chiese Viola.</p> <p>«Non falliremo» rispose Oliver, estraendo la spada da pirati, che sembrava quasi vera e che</p>
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<p>attached to a belt loop on his jeans and lifting high in the air. “My idea is for all of us to get swords —”</p> <p>“So I’ve been thinking,” Isa interrupted, “that the key to winning the Beiderman over it to play to our strengths.”</p> <p>“Good thing <i>I</i> have so fine qualities to show off to the Beiderman,” Oliver boasted.</p> <p>“Who wants to share their ideas first?” asked Isa.</p> <p>“Hyacinth should do the first Beiderman mission,” Jessie said. “She’s the craftiest person in the world.”</p> <p>Hyacinth froze, then shook her head in short, quick bursts.</p> <p>“C’mon, Hyacinth! You’re the perfect person to go first. Not too overwhelming” – here Jessie shot a glance at Laney, who was busy drawing hearts on everyone’s hands with a felt-tip pen she had found in the REP bag – “and not too obnoxious.” Here Jessie glared at Oliver, who was trying to untie Isa’s sneakers with the tip of the sword.</p> <p>“Hyacinth the Brave could totally do it,” Isa suggested.</p> <p>Hyacinth continued to shake her head.</p> <p>“Since Hyacinth is out...” Isa said, surveying her siblings, “Jessie you better go first.”</p>	<p>teneva attaccata a uno dei passanti dei jeans, e alzandola in alto. «Pensavo che potremmo avere tutti una spada...»</p> <p>«Allora, c’ho pensato bene» lo interruppe Isa. «Secondo me dovremmo sfruttare i nostri punti di forza».</p> <p>«Meno male allora che sono pieno di ottime qualità da mostrare al Beiderman» si vantò Oliver.</p> <p>«Chi vuole iniziare con qualche idea?» chiese Isa.</p> <p>«Secondo me dovrebbe essere Viola a condurre la prima missione Beiderman» propose Jessie. «È la persona più furba del mondo».</p> <p>Viola tremò e iniziò a scuotere la testa con scatti piccoli e veloci.</p> <p>«Eddai Viola! Sei la persona perfetta per andare per prima. Non sei esagerata» disse Jessie gettando un’occhia a Sofie, intenta a disegnare cuori sulle mani di tutti con un pennarello che aveva trovato nel borsone. «E non dai sui nervi» disse girandosi questa volta in direzione di Oliver che stava cercando di sciogliere le scarpe di Isa con la punta della spada.</p> <p>«Viola la coraggiosa può farcela di sicuro» aggiunse Isa.</p> <p>Viola continuò a scuotere la testa.</p> <p>«Visto che Viola è fuori ...» disse Isa, squadrandolo i fratelli. «Dovresti andare te per prima Jessie».</p>
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<p>“Why not you?” said Jessie.</p> <p>“Because of our musical disagreements,” replied Isa. Her siblings knew it was true. They all thought it was a shame the Beiderman reacted so strongly to stringed instruments, especially given Isa’s extraordinary progress over the last six years. She had left the “scary screechy” phase of violin playing shortly after that first year, and had even won a couple of violin competitions recently.</p> <p>Jessie sighed. “Fine. Send me to my doom. But someone’s coming with me.”</p> <p>“I’ll help, I’ll do it!” Laney yelled, waving an arm in the air.</p> <p>“Shhh!” said Isa, Jessie, and Hyacinth.</p> <p>“I’ll help too,” Oliver said.</p> <p>Jessie looked over the two candidates. “Okay, Laney. You’re in.”</p> <p>“Hey, what about me?” Oliver said.</p> <p>“You’re a little...” Jessie began.</p> <p>“Unpredictable,” suggested Isa.</p> <p>“Volatile,” added Jessie.</p> <p>Hyacinth didn’t say anything, but she gazed at Oliver adoringly.</p> <p>“I’m not that bad!” said Oliver.</p> <p>“No, you’re not – for a boy – but you could use some ... finesse,” said Jessie.</p> <p>“Finesse,” grumbled Oliver. “I have so much finesse, you don’t even know.”</p>	<p>«E perché non ci vai tu?» chiese Jessie.</p> <p>«Per via delle nostre divergenze musicali» rispose Isa. I bambini sapevano che aveva ragione; per loro veramente vergognoso che il Beiderman disprezzasse così tanto gli strumenti a corda, soprattutto visti i progressi che Isa aveva fatto negli ultimi sei anni. Aveva superato la fase stridente e straziante del primo anno e di recente aveva vinto anche un paio di competizioni.</p> <p>Jessie sospirò «E va bene. Che si compia il mio destino. Ma voglio che qualcuno venga con me».</p> <p>«Vengo io, vengo io!» urlò Sofie, agitando un braccio in aria.</p> <p>«Ssss!» fecero Isa, Jessie e Viola.</p> <p>«Vi aiuterò anch’io» disse Oliver.</p> <p>Jessie esaminò i due candidati. «Okay Sofie, sei dentro».</p> <p>«Ehi, e io?» disse Oliver.</p> <p>«Tu sei un po’ ...» iniziò Jessie.</p> <p>«Cosa?» chiese Oliver.</p> <p>«Impredicabile» suggerì Isa.</p> <p>«Instabile» aggiunse Jessie.</p> <p>Viola non diceva niente e guardava Oliver in adorazione.</p> <p>«Non sono così male!» disse il fratello.</p> <p>«No, per essere un maschio non sei male, ma potresti essere un po’ più... scaltro» spiegò Jessie.</p> <p>«Scaltro» brontolò Oliver. «Non te lo immagini nemmeno quanto sono scaltro».</p>
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The water wall had long stopped singing, and the sky had darkened to an endless black by the time the kids were finished bouncing ideas back and forth. It turned out that Oliver *did* have the best idea for the first Operation Beiderman. However, even Oliver ultimately agreed that he was not the best delivery person. In addition to the baseball and the sprinkler incidents, Oliver felt the Beiderman had a particular dislike for him because he used to practice dribbling on the sidewalk in front of the brownstone. This bothered no one in the entire neighborhood... unless your name was Beiderman.

“Good idea, Oliver,” Isa said as she packed up the REP bag. “I think this is going to work.”

“See,” Oliver said over his shoulder. He swaggered back to the fire escape, his pirate sword swinging from his belt loop. “I told you I got finesse.”



Quando finirono di passare da un'idea all'altra, la parete d'acqua aveva già finito di suonare da un po' e il cielo era diventato nero come la pece. Alla fine fu Oliver ad avere l'idea migliore per la prima operazione Beiderman anche se dovette ammettere che non era la persona più adatta per portarla a termine. Al di là dell'incidente con la palla e col tubo dell'irrigazione, sentiva che il Beiderman provava un certo astio nei suoi confronti perché si allenava spesso a palleggiare sul marciapiedi di fronte alla palazzina. Non disturbava nessuno, almeno chi non faceva di cognome Beiderman.

«Buona idea Oliver!» disse Isa mentre rimetteva le coperte nel borsone. «Sono sicura che funzionerà».

«Avete visto» disse Oliver alzando il mento verso l'alto e dirigendosi spavaldo verso le scale antincendio con la spada che gli penzolava dal passante dei pantaloni «Ve l'ho detto che so essere scaltro anch'io».

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 21

Five

The radiator woke Hyacinth the next day, whistling a joyful good morning. Instead of feeling cheered by it like she usually did, Hyacinth felt as if sewing needles were poking around in her stomach. It was Saturday, the official start to Operation Beiderman. Through her window she could see the last wrinkled leaves gripping the branched of the ancient red maple refusing to drift down to the ground until absolutely necessary.

Hyacinth could tell Laney was still in a deep sleep without even looking at her. Laney made a funny whistling sound when she slept. Hyacinth climbed down from her bunk, shoved her feet into her bear slippers, and tugged on her favorite fuzzy sweatshirt, which she had stolen from Oliver. She stepped over a snoozing Franz and crept out the door, careful to turn the doorknob in that special way to keep it from squeaking.

Despite being second-to-last in the Vanderbeeker family line, Hyacinth often felt she was the true middle child. Of course, Oliver had earned that right by being born between two sets of sisters, but he had the honor of being the only boy, which held him apart. The twins were exactly the same age, so

SABATO 21 DICEMBRE

Cinque

L'indomani mattina il fischio del termosifone svegliò Viola dandole un allegro buongiorno. Ma invece di sentirsi rallegrata come al solito, alla bambina sembrava come se tanti aghi le stessero bucando lo stomaco. Era sabato, giorno in cui iniziava ufficialmente l'operazione Beiderman. Dalla finestra riuscì a vedere le foglie stropicciate che si aggrappavano ai rami del vecchio acero rosso rifiutandosi il più a lungo possibile di lasciarsi cadere a terra.

Anche senza guardarla, Viola era sicura che Sofie stava ancora dormendo profondamente per via del buffo fischio che la sorella faceva mentre dormiva. Scese dal letto a castello, si infilò le pantofole a forma di orso e indossò la sua felpa preferita, tutta stropicciata, che aveva rubato a Oliver. Oltrepassò Franz che sonnecchiava e sgattaiolò fuori dalla stanza facendo attenzione a girare la maniglia della porta in modo da non farla cigolare.

Viola era il quarto membro dell'ultima generazione Vanderbeeker, ma si sentiva più spesso quello di mezzo. Sapeva bene che lo era Oliver di diritto, essendo nato tra due coppie di sorelle, ma lui aveva l'onore di essere l'unico maschio e questo lo escludeva. Quindi, se si eliminava Oliver e si contavano le

in Hyacinth's mind they sort of counted as one. If you didn't include Oliver because he was a boy, that left Hyacinth taking the true middle spot, fending for herself in a household of loud, strong-willed, attention-grabbing siblings.

To get her fair share of time with her parents, Hyacinth had developed the habit of getting up early. She tiptoed downstairs. Her dad was sitting on the couch, cradling his mug of streaming coffee, a thick book opened before him. Paganini was hopping in bizarre patterns around the living room carpet, periodically flinging himself into the air and spinning as if auditioning for a Broadway show. George Washington lay sprawled on his back, lazily swatting the bunny as he zipped past.

Hyacinth stepped around the animals and snuggled in next to her dad. He slipped his arm around her, drawing her close. He smelled like coffee and peppermint drops.

"Papa, why does the Beiderman hate us so much?" Hyacinth asked.

Papa kissed the top of Hyacinth's head. "*Hate* is such a strong word. I definitely don't think he hates you. I think he's unhappy, which has nothing to do with you kids."

Hyacinth thought about the Beiderman mission they had planned for that morning and was glad they were going to do something so

gemelle, che avevano esattamente la stessa età, come una, lei prendeva il posto della figlia di mezzo che doveva arrangiarsi da sola in una casa di sorelle testarde esuberanti e confusionarie.

Per poter passare anche lei un po' di tempo con i genitori, Viola aveva preso l'abitudine di alzarsi presto. Scese in punta di piedi le scale. Il papà era seduto sul divano con una tazza piena di caffè fumante stretta tra le mani e davanti un grosso libro. Paganini saltellava sul tappeto del salotto esibendosi in figurazioni molto strane, alle volte si lanciava in aria per poi girare su sé stesso come se stesse facendo un provino per uno spettacolo teatrale a Broadway. George Washington se ne stava tutto storto a pancia in su tentando qualche pigra zampata verso il coniglio che gli sfrecciava vicino.

Viola girò intorno ai due animali e si rannicchiò accanto al papà che le mise un braccio intorno avvicinandola più a sé. Sapeva di caffè e caramelle alla menta.

«Papà perché il Beiderman ci odia così tanto?» chiese Viola.

«*Odiare* è un parolone. Non penso proprio che vi odi. Credo che sia molto infelice, ma non per colpa vostra» disse il papà dandole un bacio sulla testa.

Viola pensò al piano che avevano preparato per quella mattina ed era molto contenta al pensiero che avrebbero fatto qualcosa di carino

<p>nice for him. Then she felt ashamed that she was too afraid to do the first mission, even though all her siblings wanted her to.</p> <p>“Papa?” asked Hyacinth.</p> <p>“Yes?”</p> <p>“How can I get more brave?” Hyacinth squeezed her eyes shut and curled near to Papa. She was afraid he would tell she would never be brave.</p> <p>“Why, Hyacinth, you’re one of the bravest persons I know,” Papa said.</p> <p>“Really?” asked Hyacinth, her eyes popping open.</p> <p>“Really,” said Papa. “It takes a super-brave person to be as generous as you are, Hyacinth. Not many people are brave enough to be so loving.”</p> <p>Hyacinth thought about this while she watched Paganini nibble on a stack of books and George Washington groom his ears.</p> <p>Papa smiled at the animals. “‘Until one has loved an animal, a part of one’s soul remains unawakened.’”</p> <p>Hyacinth looked up at her father. “What does that mean, Papa?”</p> <p>“It means that animals make our hearts happy in a very special way. A French man named Anatole France said that a long time ago.”</p> <p>The sound of a door opening, then another one, marked the end of Papa and Hyacinth’s morning alone time. A faucet turned in the</p>	<p>per il Beiderman. Ma si vergognò per non aver avuto il coraggio di affrontare quella prima missione, nonostante glielo avessero chiesto.</p> <p>«Papà?»</p> <p>«Sì?»</p> <p>«Come posso diventare più coraggiosa?»</p> <p>Viola strizzò gli occhi e si raggomitò più vicina al papà. Aveva paura di sentirsi dire che non sarebbe stato possibile.</p> <p>«Ma Viola, sei una delle persone più coraggiose che conosco» le rispose il papà.</p> <p>«Davvero?» chiese la bambina, sgranando gli occhi.</p> <p>«Davvero» disse il papà. «Solo una persona super-coraggiosa può essere generosa come te. Molte persone non sono capaci di essere così altruiste».</p> <p>Riflettendo su quelle parole, Viola si mise a guardare Paganini che mordicchiava una pila di libri e George Washington che si puliva gli orecchi.</p> <p>Il papà sorrise guardando gli animali. «Fino a quando non hai amato un animale la tua anima rimarrà sempre senza luce».</p> <p>Viola lo guardò e chiese: «Cosa vuol dire?»</p> <p>«Vuol dire che gli animali hanno un modo davvero speciale per rendere i nostri cuori felici. L’ha detto un francese di nome Anatole France tanto tempo fa».</p> <p>Il rumore di porte che si spalancavano al piano di sopra segnò la fine di quel momento esclusivo tra Viola e il papà che sentirono</p>
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upstairs bathroom, and they heard water whoosh through the pipes within the brownstone walls. A big thunk followed, which was most likely Oliver jumping off the last few ladder rungs of his soft bed.

Soft footsteps padded down the upstairs hallway and paused at the top of the stairs. Laney was awake. She descended one step at a time, the stairs creaking happily. When she got to the bathroom, she speed-walked to Papa, climbed into his lap, and nuzzled in close.

And there they sat for a precious few minutes, Papa and his two youngest children, while the rest of the family awoke and the sounds of the city began its crescendo all around them.



Ten minutes later, the Vanderbeeker apartment buzzed with kids and parents going in and out the bedrooms and bathrooms and up and down the stairs. When Isa came downstairs, she saw Oliver, his hair ruffled on one side, sitting slouched on a stool by the kitchen island, staring at an open book. She pulled out the stool across from him and sat down.

“Do you really think we can win the Beiderman over in a few days?” she asked as she gathered her hair back and braided it in a long plait.

prima il rubinetto del bagno aprirsi poi l’acqua scorrere lungo le tubature delle pareti e, infine, un grande tonfo molto probabilmente di Oliver che saltava dagli ultimi scalini del letto a soppalco.

Passettini leggeri attraversarono il corridoio e si fermarono in cima alle scale. Sofie si era alzata. La bambina iniziò a scendere uno scalino alla volta accompagnata dallo scricchiolio felice dei gradini. Quando arrivò in fondo marciò diretta verso il papà, gli salì in collo e gli si rannicchiò addosso.

Per qualche prezioso minuto rimasero tutti e tre seduti così mentre il resto della famiglia si alzava e il crescendo musicale dei rumori della città aumentava intorno a loro.



Dieci minuti dopo, l’intera famiglia Vanderbeeker ronzava qua e là per l’appartamento, entrando e uscendo dalle stanze, salendo e scendendo le scale. In cucina Isa trovò Oliver che, con i capelli tutti arruffati su un lato, era seduto ricurvo su uno degli sgabelli del bancone, concentrato a leggere un libro. Isa tirò fuori lo sgabello opposto e si mise a sedere.

-Pensi davvero che riusciremo a convincere il Beiderman in quattro giorni? - gli chiese mentre si raccoglieva i capelli e li legava in una lunga treccia.

Oliver spoke without looking away from his book. "Sure, and why don't we solve America's budget crisis and save the orcas while we're at it?"

Isa paused. "So... that's a no?"

"Honestly," Oliver said, "I have no idea."

"I think your idea was brilliant."

"Really?" Oliver perked up a bit.

"Oh yeah," Isa replied. "I have a good feeling about it."

"Then you should hear my *other* idea," said Oliver, closing his book. "I think we could use a combination of Laney, Hyacinth, and Jessie. First Jessie can pick the lock to the Beiderman's door. Next Hyacinth can torture him with her sewing needles. *Then* Laney can suffocate him with kisses and hugs until he—"

"Let's just hope the first idea works and he realizes how wonderful we are and begs us to stay," Isa interrupted.

Oliver grinned. "Too bad you're too nice. I could probably think of a way to get you in on the plan..."

While Oliver and Isa discussed the Beiderman mission, Hyacinth came downstairs with an armload of felt. She settled down on the living room carpet and busied herself cutting red felt circled for her holly berry placemats. Franz looked on with his woeful basset hound eyes,

Oliver le rispose senza alzare gli occhi dal libro. - Come no, e già che ci siamo perché non risolviamo anche la crisi di bilancio nazionale e non salviamo le orche?

Isa fece una pausa e rispose «Quindi ... è un no?»

«Sinceramente» disse Oliver. «Non ne ho la più pallida idea».

«Secondo me la tua idea è geniale».

«Davvero?» chiese Oliver illuminandosi.

«Sì, davvero. Ho proprio un buon presentimento» rispose Isa.

«Allora dovresti ascoltare anche un'altra idea» aggiunse Oliver chiudendo il libro. «È una combinazione di Sofie, Viola e Jessie. Prima Jessie forza la serratura del Beiderman, poi Viola lo tortura con gli aghi che usa per cucire e alla fine Sofie lo soffoca di baci e abbracci fino a che lui...»

«Limitiamoci a sperare che la prima idea funzioni e che lui si renda conto di quanto è meraviglioso averci qui e ci preghi di rimanere» lo interruppe Isa.

Oliver fece una smorfia contrariato «Peccato che tu sia così brava. Potrei pensare a un modo per farti partecipare al piano ...»

Mentre Oliver e Isa parlavano della missione Beiderman, Viola scese le scale con le braccia cariche di feltro. Si sistemò sul tappeto del salotto e si mise a tagliare dei cerchietti rossi per le bacche delle tovagliette a forma di agrifoglio. Franz alzò il muso da terra e, con il

then went to his food bowl and began the slow process of nudging it across the room until it banged into her knee.

Hyacinth recognized the gravity of the situation immediately. “Oh, my poor Franz! You must be starving!”

Franz looked at Hyacinth and forgave her at once. Hyacinth filled his bowl with precisely one scoop of dry dog food. The veterinarian had warned her against giving Franz more than that for fear he would get too heavy. Oliver, who had been beside her at the appointment, muttered “Too late” under his breath, just loud enough for Hyacinth to hear. It was a particular gift of Oliver’s that he could say things that adults couldn’t hear but his sisters could.

Hyacinth was feeding Franz when a disheveled Jessie came downstairs with her signature bed hair, followed by Laney wearing a glittering crown.

“We’re off!” Jessie announced to Isa, Oliver, and Hyacinth as she wrangled Laney into her puffy purple jacket and sparkly winter boots.

“Make sure to buy extra cheese croissants,” Oliver said.

“Good idea!” Jessie said as she grabbed a ragged scarf and wrapped it around her neck. “All the better to persuade the Beiderman with.”

tipico sguardo afflitto dei basset hound, si diresse verso la ciotola e iniziò a spingerla piano piano per la stanza fino a battere contro il ginocchio di Viola.

La bambina si accorse di colpo della gravità della situazione «Povero Franz! Devi essere super affamato!»

Franz guardò la padroncina e la perdonò subito mentre lei gli riempiva la ciotola con un misurino esatto di croccantini per cani. Il veterinario l’aveva avvertita di non dargli troppo da mangiare per non farlo diventare troppo pesante. Oliver, che era accanto a lei durante la visita, aveva borbottato sotto voce “Troppo tardi” e Viola era riuscita a sentirlo. Aveva proprio un dono Oliver: era capace di dire delle cose che gli adulti non riuscivano a sentire ma le sorelle sì.

Mentre Viola dava da mangiare a Franz, Jessie scese in salotto, con i capelli arruffati e la faccia ancora mezza addormentata, seguita da Sofie che indossava una corona luccicante.

«Noi usciamo» annunciò Jessie mentre lottava con Sofie per infilarle il piumino rosa e gli scarponcini glitterati.

«Ricordati di comprare qualche croissant al formaggio in più» le disse Oliver.

«Buona idea!» rispose Jessie mentre agguantava la sciarpa tutta sfilacciata e se la girava intorno al collo. «Solo il meglio per conquistare il Beiderman».

<p>“The extra cheese croissants were form me,” Oliver clarified. “But I guess you can get some for the Beiderman too.”</p> <p>Jessie and Isa shared an eye roll, the Jessie took Laney’s hand and led her outside, where they promptly bumped into Mr. Smiley, the superintendent at the big apartment building on their block, and his daughter Angie, who was friends with Oliver.</p> <p>“Hello, Laney! Hello, Jessie!” Mr. Smiley said.</p> <p>“Tell Oliver he owes me a basketball game.” Angie said. Oliver and Angie were constantly challenging each other to one-on-one basketball games, and it had to be said that Angie was so good, the boys’ basketball team <i>begged</i> her to play for them.</p> <p>Jessie and Laney waved goodbye. They passed by the brownstone with the turrets, then the brownstone covered with ivy, then the brownstone where garlands of pine were draped along all the windows and a huge wreath with a wavy burgundy bow decorated the heavy wooden door. They turned the corner onto the boulevard, where the quiet of their street gave way to the city buses with their screeching brakes and shop owners unlocking and rolling up the metal grates they had pulled down over their stores the night before. A garbage truck squealed to a stop down the street and Mark, one of their neighborhood sanitation men, jumped off the back and tossed</p>	<p>«In realtà erano per me» precisò Oliver. «Ma suppongo che ne puoi prendere qualcuno anche per il Beiderman».</p> <p>Jessie e Isa alzarono gli occhi al cielo, poi Jessie prese Sofie per mano e se la tirò dietro uscendo. Una volta fuori s’imbatterono subito nel signor Smiley, il custode della palazzina più grande dell’isolato, e in sua figlia Angie, un’amica di Oliver.</p> <p>«Ciao Sofie! Ciao Jessie!» le salutò il signor Smiley.</p> <p>«Dite a Oliver che mi deve una partita!» disse Angie. Lei e Oliver si sfidavano continuamente in partite uno contro uno e Angie era così brava a giocare a basket che i ragazzi della squadra maschile l’avevano pregata di giocare con loro.</p> <p>Dopo averli salutati, Jessie e Sofie oltrepassarono l’edificio con le torrette, poi quello ricoperto di edera e, infine, quello con dei festoni natalizi attaccati alle finestre e una ghirlanda gigante, color rosso borgogna, che decorava il portone di legno. Non appena girarono l’angolo immettendosi sulla via principale, la tranquillità della loro strada venne invasa dal fischio dei freni degli autobus e dal cigolio delle serrande che i negozianti sbloccavano e alzavano, dopo averle abbassate la notte precedente. Più avanti un camion della spazzatura si fermò stridendo a uno stop e Mark, uno dei netturbini del quartiere, saltò giù dal retro del veicolo e gettò il contenuto di un</p>
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<p>the contents of an overflowing trash bin into the hopper of the garbage truck.</p> <p>“You’re strong,” Laney called. “I’m going to be strong one day too.” Laney pumped her arms to show her biceps.</p> <p>Mark laughed and said, “Hey, I got a good joke for you, Laney. What’s red and white and white and red and white and red and white?”</p> <p>Laney tilted her head, considering. “A candy cane?”</p> <p>“That’s one answer, but I’m thinking of something else,” Mark said, grabbing hold of the end of the garbage truck once again. The truck began to move.</p> <p>“Tell me!” yelled Laney at the retreating truck.</p> <p>Mark bellowed the answer. “Santa Claus rolling down the hill!”</p> <p>Laney giggled and waved as Mark saluted her from the back of the garbage truck.</p> <p>Down the avenue they went. They passed by Harlem Coffee with their long line of bleary-eyed customers, A to Z Deli, which was just opening up, then the library, still closed for another few hours. Once they passed the library, the sisters made a right at 137th Street. They smelled the delicious, butter sweet bread smells from Castleman’s Bakery before they saw the storefront.</p> <p>Castleman’s Bakery, home of the legendary cheese croissants, was right across from the entrance to City College. It had sat in that same</p>	<p>cassonetto strapieno all’interno del compattatore.</p> <p>«Che forte che sei. Un giorno sarò forte anch’io così» urlò Sofie gonfiando le braccia per mostrare i bicipiti.</p> <p>Mark rise e disse: «Ehi, ho un indovinello per te, Sofie. Cos’è quella cosa rossa e bianca e rossa e bianca e rossa e bianca?»</p> <p>Sofie piegò la testa di lato pensierosa «Un bastoncino di zucchero?»</p> <p>«Potrebbe essere una risposta, ma stavo pensando a un’altra cosa» disse Mark, aggrappandosi di nuovo a un’estremità del camion che iniziava a muoversi.</p> <p>«Dimmelo!» urlò Sofie mentre il veicolo si allontanava.</p> <p>«Babbo Natale che rotola giù da una collina!» urlò ancora più forte Mark.</p> <p>Sofie ridacchiò e ricambiò il saluto di Mark.</p> <p>Le due sorelle continuarono a camminare lungo la strada passando l’Harlem Caffè con la sua lunga fila di clienti dallo sguardo stanco, il bazar Tutto Deli in fase di apertura, e la biblioteca, ancora chiusa per qualche ora. Dopo di che svoltarono a destra sulla 137^a strada e iniziarono a sentire il profumino delizioso delle prelibatezze del forno dei Castleman ancor prima di riuscire a vedere il negozio.</p> <p>Il forno, patria dei leggendari croissant al formaggio, si trovava proprio di fronte all’entrata del City College. Da decenni manteneva quella stessa identica posizione e si</p>
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location for decades and had a loyal following of people who would cross boroughs and state lines to buy bread and pastries there. The Vanderbecker kids truly believed the Beiderman would take one bite of the buttery-but-not-greasy, flaky-but-not-crumbly pastry and be won over at once.

Mr. Castleman was the renowned neighborhood baker, and his wife managed the front of the store. They had a son, Benny, an eight-grader at the twins' middle school and a close friend of Isa's. He worked as a cashier at the bakery on the weekends and some days after school. At his suggestion, his parents had recently purchased an electronic touchscreen register that had all the prices programmed in, along with a credit card machine, allowing customers to sign their name with their finger. Benny, however, was the only one who knew how to operate this register. Mrs. Castleman preferred to use the antique cash register that made a brisk *ka-ching!* sound whenever the drawer opened.

“Hey hey, what’s up, Vanderbeekers!” Benny called from behind the registers with a wide grin. He wore a football jersey and blue jeans under his work apron. Jessie smiled at him, and Laney ducked under the counter and wrapped her arms around his waist.

era creato un fedele seguito di clienti che avrebbero attraversato distretti cittadini e confini nazionali pur di comprare pane e pasticcini lì. I fratelli Vanderbecker erano convinti che sarebbe bastato un solo morso del famoso impasto burroso-ma-non-unto, morbido-ma-non-friabile per convincere il Beiderman.

Il signor Castelman era il fornaio più famoso del quartiere mentre sua moglie si occupava della vendita. Avevano un figlio, Benny, un ragazzino di tredici anni che frequentava la stessa scuola delle gemelle ed era molto amico di Isa. Durante il weekend e alcuni pomeriggi dopo scuola Benny lavorava nella panetteria come cassiere e aveva convinto i genitori a comprare un registratore di cassa touchscreen con tutti i prezzi dei prodotti già inseriti e un sistema di pagamento elettronico per carte di credito che permetteva ai clienti di firmare usando le dita. Nessuno a parte lui sapeva usare il nuovo registratore; la signora Castleman preferiva usare ancora quello storico che faceva *cha-ching!* ogni volta che il cassetto portasoldi veniva aperto.

«Guarda, guarda chi c'è, le Vanderbecker!» disse Benny da dietro i due registratori accogliendole con un largo sorriso. Sotto il grembiule da lavoro indossava i jeans e la maglietta della squadra di calcio. Jessie gli sorrise e Sofie passò sotto il bancone per avvolgergli le braccia intorno ai fianchi.

<p>“Hello, Princess Laney,” Benny said as Laney adjusted the crown on her head.</p> <p>“I have a joke for you,” Laney said.”</p> <p>“Tell me.”</p> <p>“Okay, what is Santa Claus rolling down a hill? Wait. That’s not it. I forgot.” Laney’s eyebrows were furrowed with confusion.</p> <p>“What’s red and white and ...” Jessie prompted.</p> <p>“Oh, yeah. What’s red and white and red and white and red and white?”</p> <p>Benny tapped his chin with his index finger.</p> <p>“Hmm ... that’s a tough one. Hmm ...”</p> <p>Laney was gleeful. “Do you give up? Should I tell you?”</p> <p>“Tell me. I can’t think of anything.”</p> <p>“Santa Claus rolling down the hill!”</p> <p>Benny chuckled. “Oh man, that <i>is</i> a good joke. I’m going to remember that one.” Benny picked Laney up and set her on the counter next to the register, then plucked a jam cookie from a wide-mouthed glass jar and handed it to her. Then he reached in again and retrieved one for Jessie, presenting it to her with a gallant bow.</p> <p>“Thanks, Benny,” Jessie said, taking a bite of the crumbly cookie. She had known him for so long that she forgot to call him Benjamin, the name he decided he wanted to be called the day he turned ten.</p>	<p>«Buongiorno principessa Sofie» disse Benny mentre la bambina si sistemava la corona sulla testa.</p> <p>«Ho un indovinello per te» disse Sofie.</p> <p>«Spara».</p> <p>«Va bene. Cos’è Babbo Natale che rotola giù da una collina? No aspetta, non era così. Me lo sono dimenticato» disse Sofie con espressione perplessa.</p> <p>«Cos’è quella cosa rossa e bianca e ...» la aiutò Jessie.</p> <p>«Ah sì! Cos’è quella cosa rossa e bianca e rossa e bianca e rossa e bianca?»</p> <p>Benny si tamburellò il mento con il dito indice «Mhmm... questo è difficile».</p> <p>Sofie era al settimo cielo. «Ti arrendi? Te lo posso dire?»</p> <p>«Dimmelo. Non mi viene in mente niente».</p> <p>«Babbo Natale che rotola giù da una collina!»</p> <p>«Accidenti, questo sì che è un indovinello. Me lo ricorderò sicuramente» disse Benny ridacchiano e sollevando Sofie per metterla a sedere sul bancone. Poi pescò un biscotto alla marmellata da un largo barattolo di vetro e glielo porse. Si allungò di nuovo, ne prese un altro per Jessie e glielo offrì facendo un profondo inchino.</p> <p>«Grazie Benny» disse Jessie dando un morso al biscotto. Lo conosceva da così tanti anni che si era dimenticata di dire Benjamin, come lui voleva essere chiamato da quando aveva compiuto dieci anni.</p>
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<p>Mrs. Castleman peered through round tortoiseshell spectacles over the glass cane containing the breads and pastries, her gaze just barely skimming the top.</p> <p>“The usual, yes?” she asked.</p> <p>Jessie nodded. “Also, I need three of your best breakfast goodies for our upstairs neighbor.”</p> <p>“How are Miss Josie and Mr. Jeet doing?” asked Mrs. Castleman.</p> <p>“They’re doing fine but the pastries aren’t for them. This time it’s for our upstairs, upstairs neighbor. Mr. Beiderman.”</p> <p>Mrs. Castleman raised an eyebrow in surprise. “Mr. Biederman?”</p> <p>“He lives on the third floor. We’re trying to persuade him to like us.” Jessie rummaged through her bag for the wallet.</p> <p>“Mr. Beiderman,” Mrs. Castleman repeated softly while she leaned down to pluck pastries from the display case.</p> <p>Something in the way Mrs. Castleman said his name made Jessie stop. She bent down to peer through the glass case, but she could only see Mrs. Castleman’s hand reaching out to retrieve the pastries. “Do you know him, Mrs. Castleman?”</p> <p>A pause. Jessie was about to ask yet again, louder, when Benny interrupted.</p> <p>“So, Jessie. Did you hear about the eight grade dance?” he asked casually, leaning his elbows on the counter. Laney still sat next to the register picking through the coins in the</p>	<p>Facendo appena capolino dalla vetrina, ricca di pezzi dolci e salati, la signora Castleman sbirciò le nuove arrivate da dietro gli occhiali tondi e tartarugati.</p> <p>«Il solito vero?» chiese</p> <p>Jessie annuì «Vorrei anche tre delle vostre migliori prelibatezze per il vicino del piano di sopra».</p> <p>«Come stanno la signora Josie e il signor Jeet?» chiese la signora Castleman.</p> <p>«Stanno benissimo, ma i dolci non sono per loro. Questa volta sono per il vicino che abita ancora più sopra, il signor Beiderman».</p> <p>«Il signor Beiderman?» chiese la signora Castelman con espressione sorpresa.</p> <p>«Vive al terzo piano e stiamo cercando di far colpo su di lui» spiegò Jessie rovistando nella borsa in cerca del portafogli.</p> <p>«Il signor Beiderman» ripeté piano la signora Castleman mentre si piegava in avanti per prendere le paste dalla vetrina.</p> <p>Qualcosa nel modo in cui la signora Castleman aveva pronunciato quel nome bloccò Jessie che si piegò per sbirciare oltre il vetro, riuscendo solo a vedere la signora che si risollevava «Lei lo conosce?» chiese.</p> <p>Una pausa. Jessie stava per porle di nuovo la domanda, a voce più alta, quando Benny la interruppe.</p> <p>«Allora Jessie. Hai sentito del ballo dell’ultimo anno?» chiese con aria indifferente, appoggiando i gomiti sul bancone. Sofie era</p>
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little cup that said. "Take a penny, leave a penny."

Jessie glanced at Mrs. Castleman once more before turning back to Benny. "No. What about it?" Jessie said to Benny as she dug through her tote. Battered science notebook. A couple of pieces of candy in tired wrappers. Scuffed calculator. Of, there was her wallet.

"Well," Benny continued, "do you think your sister would want to go?"

Jessie lifted her eyes to his. "What sister?"

Benny stuck his hands deep into the pockets of his jeans. "Isa. Your twin sister?"

"Isa? Go to an eight grade dance? Benny, she's a seventh-grader. She can't go to an eight grade dance."

"She can go *with* an eight-grader. Which I am. An eight-grader. And I would ask her nicely, of course. Do you think she would say yes?" Benny began to shift from foot to foot.

Laney interrupted. "I like to dance," she informed him while handing him two pennies from the "Take a penny" cup. Benny took the pennies from her and dropped them back into the cup.

Meanwhile, Jessie's mind spun like the centrifuge she'd used in science class last month. Benny wanted to take her sister to a dance? Without her? They had never gone to a school dance with a date, ever. That would

ancora seduta accanto al registratore di cassa e stava scegliendo alcune monetine dal bicchierino con su scritto "Prendi un penny, lascia un penny."

Jessie dette un'ultima occhiata alla signora Castleman prima di rigirarsi verso Benny

«No. Cosa dovrei sapere?» chiese tornando a scavare nella borsa. Il maltrattato quaderno di scienze. Due pezzetti di caramella dentro involucri sul punto di cedere. La calcolatrice malconcia. Ah, ecco il portafogli.

«Mi chiedevo» continuò Benny «secondo te a tua sorella farebbe piacere andarci?»

Jessie alzò gli occhi per guardarlo «Quale sorella?»

Benny sprofondò le mani nelle tasche dei jeans «Isa, la tua gemella?»

«Isa? A un ballo dell'ultimo anno? Ma lei non può andarci, non è ancora all'ultimo anno».

«Può andarci *insieme* a uno dell'ultimo anno. Come me. Glielo chiederei come si deve, s'intende. Pensi che direbbe di sì?» chiese Benny ondeggiando da un piede all'altro.

Sofie s'intromise «A me piace ballare» informò l'amico porgendogli due penny che aveva preso dal bicchierino delle offerte.

Benny li prese e li rimise al loro posto.

Intanto la testa di Jessie stava girando come la centrifuga che avevano usato in classe, il mese prima, durante la lezione di scienze. Benny voleva portare sua sorella a un ballo? Senza di

<p>surely violate the Rule of the Twins.</p> <p>Somewhere in that unwritten contract, there must be a clause that clearly stated that neither was to attend a dance without the other, especially with a <i>date</i>.</p> <p>“I am positive she wouldn’t want to go with <i>you</i>, Benny. I’m sorry,” Jessie said. “Not that you aren’t great... I definitely think not.”</p> <p>Benny’s face fell. “Why not?”</p> <p>Jessie started to feel a little bad for him. “It’s nothing against you. I just can’t imagine her saying yes.” She opened her wallet and pulled out some money.</p> <p>“I like to dance,” Laney repeated as she took another penny from the cup and tried to scrub it clean with the hem of her jacket.</p> <p>Benny didn’t respond to either sister. He carefully rang up Jessie’s order on the cash register, took her money, then handed her the change.</p> <p>“Thanks, Benny,” Jessie said, grabbing the bags of croissants and goodies for Mr. Beiderman. Benny lifted Laney down from the counter and she ducked back under and took Jessie’s hand.</p> <p>“See you around,” said Jessie with a brief wave. “Bye, Mrs. Castleman.”</p> <p>The two sisters left the bakery while Benny and his mother watched them disappear from</p>	<p>lei? Non erano mai andate a un ballo scolastico da sole. E non erano mai andate a un ballo per un appuntamento, mai. Quello avrebbe violato sicuramente la Regola delle gemelle. Da qualche parte in quel contratto implicito doveva esserci una clausola che vietava a una sorella di partecipare da sola a un ballo, soprattutto per un appuntamento.</p> <p>«Sono sicura che non vorrebbe andarci con te, Benny. Mi dispiace» disse Jessie. «Non è per te... è solo che non credo proprio».</p> <p>L’espressione di Benny si rabbuiò. «Perché?» Jessie iniziò a provare un po’ di dispiacere per lui. «Non è per te. Solo che non riesco a immaginarla a dirti di sì» spiegò aprendo il portafogli e tirando fuori i soldi.</p> <p>«A me piace ballare» ripeté Sofi mentre prendeva un altro penny e cercava di pulirlo strofinandolo contro l’orlo del piumino.</p> <p>Benny non rispose a nessuna delle due, digitò velocemente l’ordine di Jessie sul registratore, prese i soldi e le dette il resto.</p> <p>«Grazie Benny» disse Jessie, afferrando i sacchetti con i croissant e le altre prelibatezze per il signor Beiderman. Benny sollevò Sofie per farla scendere, la bambina passò di nuovo sotto il bancone e prese per mano la sorella.</p> <p>«Ci vediamo» disse Jessie con un breve cenno della mano. «Arrivederci signora Castleman».</p> <p>Le sorelle uscirono dalla panetteria mentre Benny e la madre le guardarono scomparire tra la folla. La signora Castleman vide bene di</p>
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view. Mrs. Castleman wisely stepped into the back room, where her husband was twisting and kneading bread, leaving her son alone with his thoughts.

Six

The moment Jessie left the bakery, all thoughts of dances and Benny and the Rule of the Twins vanished. Laney, who carried the Beezerman's bag of pastries, surreptitiously peeked into the brown bag while they were walking home. The sugary, spicy smell of the apple turnover almost made her dizzy. She wondered if the Beezerman would mind if she took that one for herself.

“Don't even think about it,” Jessie said, reaching down to cup Laney's chin. Laney puffed out her cheeks and rolled the top of the bag closed.

Isa, Hyacinth, and Oliver were waiting in the kitchen when Jessie and Laney returned home.

“Quick – we sent Mama and Papa upstairs and told them we would bring them breakfast in bed. They looked so pleased they didn't even ask any questions!” said Isa, her face flushed.

Hyacinth had taken out her special tea tray and tea things to use for the Beiderman's breakfast. The tray was faded but still pretty, with a big rainbow in the middle and three cherubs with harps floating above it. Her chine teapot only had two chips, and she folded a

spostarsi nella stanza sul retro dove il marito stava impastando e intrecciando il pane, lasciando il figlio da solo con i suoi pensieri.

Sei

Nel momento esatto in cui uscì dal panificio per tornare a casa, Jessie si dimenticò subito dei balli, di Benny e della Regola delle gemelle. Sofie, intanto, gettava occhiate furtive alle paste per il Doberman, dentro al sacchetto di carta che teneva in mano. Il profumino dolce e speziato della sfoglia di mele le dava il capogiro. Chissà se il Doberman se la fosse presa se teneva quella per sé.

«Non ci pensare nemmeno» disse Jessie piegandosi per afferrare il mento della sorella tra le mani. Sofie gonfiò le guance e richiuse il sacchetto.

Quando rientrarono in casa, Isa, Viola e Oliver le stavano aspettando in cucina.

«Sbrighiamoci! Abbiamo spedito la mamma e il papà di sopra per portargli la colazione a letto. Erano così felici all'idea che non ci hanno nemmeno fatto domande» disse Isa, con il viso arrossato.

Per preparare la colazione al Beiderman, Viola aveva tirato fuori il suo servizio da tè migliore compreso di vassoio, un po' sbiadito ma ancora molto carino, con un grande arcobaleno al centro e sopra tre cherubini che

piece of red checkered fabric for a napkin and laid it on the side of the tray.

The kids transferred the remains from the morning's coffeepot into the teapot; then Oliver dumped three generous spoonfuls of sugar into it and Isa added milk. After Jessie stirred it, Isa placed the teapot on the tray, and Hyacinth artfully managed the pastries from Laney's bag. To their knowledge, the Beiderman had never experienced the joy of breakfast in bed, and they were certain that Oliver's excellent idea would win him over.

"Ready?" Jessie asked Laney.

"Ready,ready!" Laney chirruped.

The Vanderbeekers went upstairs, crept past Mama and Papa's bedroom, then opened the door that led to the first-floor hallway.

"Be careful," Isa whispered.

"Break a leg," Oliver whispered.

Hyacinth didn't say anything; she just bit her lip and looked worried. They watched as Jessie and Laney went up the stairs.

The scent of laundry soap, old books, and double chocolate pecan cookies from the Vanderbeekers' floor gave way to the smell of Miss Josie's Southern Rose perfume on the second floor. The stairs leading to the third floor groaned all the way up, and the air turned

fluttuavano muniti di arpe. La teiera di ceramica era scheggiata, ma solo in due punti; Viola aveva piegò un pezzettino di stoffa a quadretto rossi e lo appoggiò al lato del vassoio.

Una volta trasferito nella teiera il caffè avanzato dalla mattina, Oliver ci ficcò dentro tre generosi cucchiari di zucchero mentre Isa aggiunse del latte. Poi Jessie mescolò il tutto, Isa appoggiò la teiera sul vassoio e Viola dette un tocco artistico finale sistemando le paste che erano nel sacchetto di Sofie. Per quanto ne sapevano, il Beiderman non aveva mai provato il piacere di una colazione a letto ed erano sicuri che l'idea fantastica di Oliver l'avrebbe conquistato.

«Pronta?» chiese Jessie a Sofie.

«Prontissima!» cinguettò Sofie.

Tutti e cinque salirono le scale, oltrepassarono di soppiatto la camera dei genitori e aprirono la porta che dava sul corridoio del primo piano.

«State attente» sussurrò Isa.

«In bocca al lupo» aggiunse Oliver.

Viola non disse niente; si morse solo le labbra con espressione preoccupata.

Sotto lo sguardo attento dei fratelli, Jessie e Sofie iniziarono a salire le scale. Al secondo piano il profumo di rose della signora Josie prese il posto di quello di bucato, libri vecchi e cookies tipico del loro piano. Salendo al terzo piano, le scale iniziarono a scricchiolare e un odore di chiuso e umidità

misty and stale, as if the brownstone were warning them away.

Jessie took a deep breath and prepared to knock. Before she could exhale, Laney pounded her two fists on the door.

“Laney!” Jessie tried to balance the tray while preventing Laney from attacking the door again. The teapot shivered and slid to the edge of the tray. Jessie lifted up a knee to prop up the tray but overcompensated.

“*Fudge!*” Jessie blurted out as the teapot slid to the other side of the tray, tipped off the side, and shattered on the ground. The three pastries fell on top of it.

“Fudge, fudge, *fudge!*”

Jessie cast a look at the door. The peephole was a collection of circles getting smaller and smaller, converging on a dark round circle in the middle. Then – the circle blinked.

“Oh, *fudge!*” This time Jessie’s expletive was quite a bit louder. She scooped Laney up and crashed down the stairs, the destroyed breakfast left abandoned outside the Beiderman’s door.



Isa, Hyacinth, and Oliver were waiting by the first-floor doorway when they heard Jessie’s yelling, followed by a terrific crash. Seconds later, they saw Jessie and Laney barreling down the stairs. When Isa saw the terror on

invase l’aria; come se l’edificio le stesse avvertendo di non avvicinarsi.

Jessie inspirò profondamente prima di bussare. Ma prima di avere il tempo di espirare, Sofie batté alla porta con i pugni.

«Sofie!» disse Jessie cercando di tenere in equilibrio il vassoio mentre tratteneva la sorella per evitare che battesse di nuovo sulla porta. La teiera vacillò e slittò verso un’estremità del vassoio e Jessie alzò un ginocchio per controbilanciare, ma esagerò.

«Cavolo!» sbottò mentre la teiera slittava verso l’altra estremità del vassoio, cadeva a terra e si frantumava in mille pezzi seguita dalle tre paste che le si adagiarono sopra.

«Cavolo, cavolo, *cavolo!*»

Jessie guardò la porta. Lo spioncino era composto da una serie di cerchi che convergevano sempre più piccoli in uno centrale nero. Il cerchietto si sollevò.

«Oh *cavolo!*» impreccò Jessie, questa volta a voce più alta. Sollevò Sofi e si precipitò giù per le scale abbandonando i resti della colazione davanti alla porta del Beiderman.



Isa, Viola e Oliver stavano aspettando sulla porta quando sentirono l’urlo di Jessie seguito da un fortissimo schianto. Qualche secondo dopo videro le sorelle precipitarsi giù per le scale. Isa lesse il terrore sulla faccia di Jessie e

<p>Jessie’s face, she did not stop ask questions. Isa swung open the door to their apartment, and together the five Vanderbeekers scrambled inside and let the door slam behind them.</p> <p>“Complete... fail...” Jessie wheezed, her back against the hallway wall.</p> <p>“Shhh!” said Isa, pointing a finger at Mama and Papa’s room. The kids tiptoed to Isa and Jessie’s room and shut the door.</p> <p>“What happened?” asked Isa the moment the door closed.</p> <p>Jessie was frantic. “I lost control of the tray and everything fell. I’m sorry, Hyacinth, I broke your teapot.”</p> <p>Hyacinth looked back at Jessie with wide eyes.</p> <p>“After I dropped the breakfast, I looked up at the door and I saw his evil eye blink at me through the peephole and it was like he was cursing me with thousand curses! I didn’t think – I should have stayed there and cleaned up or tried to explain to him or something! I’m sorry, I screwed up,” Jessie babbled.</p> <p>“Okay, okay, it’s okay. I’ll clean it up, don’t worry,” Isa said, pulling Jessie into a hug.</p> <p>“I’ll help,” Hyacinth said.</p> <p>“Me too,” Oliver offered.</p> <p>Laney was put in charge of soothing Jessie’s wounded soul by feeding her cheese croissants</p>	<p>non perse tempo a fare domande, spalancò la porta dell’appartamento e tutti e cinque si riversarono dentro lasciando che la porta sbattesse dietro di loro.</p> <p>«Un completo... disastro...» ansimò Jessie appoggiando la schiena contro la parete del corridoio.</p> <p>«Ssss!» disse Isa, indicando col dito la stanza dei genitori. In punta di piedi, si trasferirono tutti in camera delle gemelle.</p> <p>«Cos’è successo?» chiese Isa non appena la porta fu chiusa.</p> <p>Jessie, sconvolta, rispose: «Ho perso il controllo del vassoio e mi è caduto tutto. Mi dispiace Viola, ho rotto la teiera».</p> <p>Viola guardò la sorella spalancando gli occhi.</p> <p>«Dopo aver fatto cadere la colazione, ho guardato verso la porta e ho visto l’occhio malvagio del Beiderman che mi guardava dallo spioncino» balbettò Jessie. «Sembrava come se mi stesse lanciando mille maledizioni in un colpo solo! Non riesco a pensare... sarei dovuta rimanere a pulire o a cercare di spiegargli quello che era successo o che ne so! Mi dispiace, ho rovinato tutto».</p> <p>«Okay, okay, nessun problema. Pulisco io, non ti preoccupare» disse Isa stringendo Jessie in un abbraccio.</p> <p>«Ti aiuto anch’io» disse Viola.</p> <p>«Anch’io» si offrì Oliver.</p> <p>Sofie venne incaricata di alleviare il dolore di Jessie rifocillandola con croissant al formaggio</p>
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while Isa, Hyacinth, and Oliver gathered cleaning supplies and a garbage bag and went upstairs. Tears dripped from Hyacinth's eyes as she gathered the remains of her beloved teapot and put them in the garbage bag. Oliver mopped up the spill with paper towels and mourned the ruined, soggy pastries. Isa did a final mop to get rid of the stickiness, careful to keep her eyes averted from the peephole. They slinked down the stairs, each one thinking that this was a huge setback to Operation Beiderman.



While Isa, Oliver, and Hyacinth were cleaning up, Jessie and Laney delivered croissants to their parents. Laney went over to Papa's side of the bed and snuggled next to him as he scrolled through his phone reviewing job tickets, which Laney knew meant all the computer problems people wanted Papa to fix, like when someone spilled coffee on their keyboard or when the computer showed only a black screen no matter how many buttons you pushed.

Mama looked up from her own phone when Jessie stood by her bed. Mama had been clicking through a Realtor website.

"Everything okay?" Mama asked, setting her phone on the bedside table.

Jessie shrugged and handed over the bag of croissants.

mentre Isa, Viola e Oliver presero il necessario per pulire, un sacco della spazzatura e salirono le scale. Gli occhi di Viola si riempirono di lacrime mentre raccoglieva i resti della sua amata teiera per buttarli via. Oliver asciugò l'acqua del tè con della carta igienica mentre si disperava guardando le paste ormai fradice e rovinare. Isa completò l'opera passando lo straccio per togliere l'appiccicume dal pavimento, evitando di guardare lo spioncino. Poi filarono veloci giù per le scale pensando che quello era un brutto colpo per l'operazione Beiderman.



Mentre Isa, Oliver e Viola erano a pulire, Jessie e Sofie portarono i croissant ai genitori. Sofie andò dalla parte del letto del papà e si rannicchiò accanto a lui. Il papà stava scorrendo sul telefono vari preventivi, e Sofie sapeva bene che erano per le persone che gli chiedevano di risolvere i problemi che avevano con i loro computer, come quando si rovescia il caffè sulla tastiera o lo schermo diventa nero e non cambia, anche premendo tutti i tasti possibili.

La mamma, che stava guardando un sito immobiliare, alzò lo sguardo dal cellulare quando Jessie le si mise davanti.

«Va tutto bene?» chiese, appoggiando il cellulare sul comodino.

<p>“Talk to me,” her mom said, beckoning Jessie to sit on the bed.</p> <p>Jessie perched on the side. “This whole moving thing sucks big-time.”</p> <p>Mama nodded and wrapped an arm around her. “This place has so many memories.”</p> <p>Mama looked at the wall where six years ago an unsupervised three-year-old Oliver had drawn a post-impressionist-Picasso-like depiction of their family. The miraculous thing about the artwork was that Oliver had drawn not just himself, Jessie with her signature-wild-scientist hair, Isa with her typical smooth ponytail, and his parents, but also yet-to-be-born Hyacinth and Laney.</p> <p>“I feel like we need to cut out that part of the wall and bring it with us to our new home,” Mama said.</p> <p>“Uncle Arthur could do it,” Jessie suggested.</p> <p>“I don’t think the Beiderman – I mean, <i>Mr. Beiderman</i> – would appreciate us gouging a hole in his wall.” Mama continued to look at the drawing. Then, to Jessie’s horror, she saw a tear roll down Mama’s face.</p> <p>“Oh, Mama, don’t cry!” Jessie said, even as she felt the burning of her own eyes.</p>	<p>Jessie alzò le spalle e le porse il sacchetto con i croissants.</p> <p>«Dimmi tutto» le disse la mamma, facendole un cenno di sedersi sul letto.</p> <p>Jessie si appollaiò sull’estremità e disse: «Questa cosa del trasferimento è una vera rottura».</p> <p>La mamma annuì e le mise un braccio intorno alle spalle. «Questo posto è pieno di ricordi» disse, guardando la parete dove sei anni prima Oliver, lasciato incustodito a tre anni, aveva disegnato un ritratto della famiglia stile Picasso post-impressionista. E il miracolo di quel capolavoro era che non si era limitato a disegnare sé stesso, i suoi genitori, Jessie con i capelli alla scienziato pazzo e Isa con la sua coda perfetta, ma anche Viola e Sofie che non erano ancora nate.</p> <p>«Vorrei tanto togliere quella parte di parete e portarla nella nuova casa» disse la mamma.</p> <p>«Potremmo chiedere allo zio Arthur» suggerì Jessie.</p> <p>«Non credo che al Beiderman – voglio dire, al <i>signor</i> Beiderman – farebbe piacere se gli scavassimo un buco nel muro» disse la mamma continuando a guardare il disegno. Con grande dispiacere, Jessie le vide una lacrima scivolare lungo il volto.</p> <p>«Non piangere mamma!» disse, anche se sentiva gli occhi bruciare.</p>
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“Sweetie, don’t worry about me.” Mama brushed her tear away and gave Jessie a brave smile. “Just being sentimental.”

Jessie’s throat constricted. She wanted to rewind the last hour and do it all over again. In her mind she saw herself handling the tray with elegance and poise, presenting it to a grateful Beiderman, who accepted it with a smile. He would be so relieved to have real food after all those years of frozen dinners. With his first bite of cheese croissant his eyes would light up and he would announce that the Vanderbeeker could stay in their apartment forever.

Of only the reimagined story could be reality.

Seven

The mood was somber by the time the five Vanderbeeker kids gathered back downstairs to eat their own breakfast. Hyacinth felt responsible for the failed outreach as she watched Jessie mope; after all, Jessie had wanted Hyacinth to do the first Beiderman mission. Now Hyacinth needed to fix it.

Directly after breakfast, Hyacinth retreated to her room with Franz. While her dog occupied himself by staring out the window at a bird, Hyacinth took out sewing supplies and sheets

«Non ti preoccupare per me, tesoro» La mamma si asciugò velocemente la lacrima e le rivolse un sorriso coraggioso. «Solo un po’ di nostalgia».

Jessie sentì un nodo alla gola. Avrebbe voluto riavvolgere l’ultima ora e rifare tutto da capo. Nella sua testa si immaginava mentre reggeva il vassoio composta ed elegante e lo offriva al Beiderman che accettava sorridendole riconoscente. Finalmente del cibo vero dopo tutti quegli anni di cene surgelate. Al primo morso di croissant al formaggio gli occhi gli si illuminavano e annunciava che i Vanderbeeker sarebbe potuti rimanere nell’appartamento per sempre.

Se solo fosse andata veramente così.

Sette

Quando scesero per fare finalmente colazione, i fratelli avevano il morale a terra. Guardando l’espressione afflitta sul volto di Jessie, Viola si sentiva responsabile per il tentativo fallito; dopo tutto, la sorella aveva proposto lei per la prima missione Beiderman. Adesso toccava a lei salvarla.

Subito dopo colazione, Viola si ritirò nella sua stanza con Franz. Mentre il cane era impegnato a seguire un uccellino fuori dalla finestra, prese il necessario per cucire, dei fogli rettangolari

of red and green felt. Carefully, she cut out letters spelling the Beiderman's name from the green felt; then she threaded her needle and sewed the letters onto the rectangular red piece.

The letters did not end up going across the placemat in a straight line. Instead, four letters in, she realized that there was a distinct upward slant. She tried to correct it with the next few letters, but when she reached the *M*, the name was tilting the opposite direction, by the time she finished, the name had a decidedly bumpy look about it. And something else seemed off. She thought that the *I* was before the *E*, but after she sewed the letters on, it looked a little wrong.

Hyacinth's hand was aching by the time she finished. She rolled the placemat up and tied a green velvet ribbon around it. She let her linger on the green ribbon, already mourning the loss of that piece from her collection. It was not easy to part with her beautiful things.

"You ready to be brave, Franz?" asked Hyacinth. Franz lifted his front legs and rested them against her stomach.

It was time for Hyacinth to be more than just the fourth Vanderbecker, the shy one, the scared one.

She needed to be Hyacinth the Brave: a Girl on a Mission to Save Her Home.

rossi e del feltro verde. Facendo attenzione, tagliò le lettere che componevano il nome Beiderman dal feltro, poi infilò l'ago e iniziò a cucirle sul foglio.

Ma le lettere non sembravano seguire una linea retta; anzi, dopo aver inserito le prime quattro, si accorse che c'era un'evidente pendenza verso l'alto. Tentò di correggerla aggiungendo le altre lettere ma quando arrivò alla *M* il nome si stava inclinando nella direzione opposta. A lavoro finito, il nome aveva un aspetto decisamente irregolare. E c'era anche qualcos'altro che non andava. Era convinta che la *I* venisse prima della *E*, ma ora che aveva cucito le lettere, aveva l'impressione che ci fosse qualcosa di sbagliato.

Ora che aveva finito incominciava a sentire male alla mano. Arrotolò la tovaglietta e la legò con un nastro di velluto verde. Si fermò un attimo a guardare il nastro, rimpiangendo già la perdita di quel pezzo della sua collezione. Non era mai facile separarsi da tutte le cose belle che aveva.

«Pronto a essere coraggioso, Franz?» chiese al cane. Franz alzò le zampe anteriori e le appoggiò sullo stomaco della padroncina.

Era arrivato il momento per Viola di essere qualcosa di più della quarta Vanderbecker, quella timida e paurosa.

Doveva essere "Viola la Coraggiosa: una ragazza in missione per salvare il suo regno".

<p>Together Hyacinth the Brave and Franz left their apartment and march upstairs. The brownstone stairs whimpered all the way up.</p> <p>“Be brave, be brave, be brave,” Hyacinth whispered to herself. She looked down at Franz, and her faithful dog grinned at her and wagged his tail. Hyacinth squared her shoulders and knocked on the door.</p> <p>The second Hyacinth knocked, she knew something bad was going to happen. She knew before she heard the stomping from inside the third-floor apartment and the barrage of clicks and bangs from the locks being disengaged. She knew even before the door swung open.</p> <p>Hyacinth trembled as she stood before the monster of a man with shaggy dark hair and a beard streaked with white. His face was creased and pale and lifeless. He was wearing black, black, black.</p> <p>“<i>Leave me alone.</i>” His voice shocked Hyacinth. It sounded like he was talking around a mouthful of nails. “Move out of here, and <i>let me be.</i>”</p> <p>Hyacinth stood frozen for a full second. No longer was she Hyacinth the Brave. She was back to being the fourth Vanderbeeker, first-class worrier and the shyest kid on 141st Street. She dropped the placemat at his feet and stumbled down the stairs, Franz at her heels. She reached the door to their apartment and slammed the door behind her.</p>	<p>Insieme, Viola la Coraggiosa e Franz uscirono dall’appartamento e marciarono su per le scale. Il lamento degli scalini li accompagnò fino al terzo piano.</p> <p>«Coraggiosa, coraggiosa, coraggiosa» si ripeteva Viola a bassa voce. Guardò Franz; il suo fedele amico le sorrise e dimenò la coda. La bambina raddrizzò le spalle e bussò alla porta.</p> <p>E in quel preciso istante capì che qualcosa di terribile stava per accadere. Lo capì ancor prima di sentire dei passi pesanti che si avvicinavano dall’interno e un ambaradan di clic e bang che sbloccavano le serrature. Lo capì ancor prima che la porta si spalancasse.</p> <p>Viola iniziò a tremare trovandosi di fronte un mostro d’uomo dai capelli ispidi e neri e la barba con striature bianche. Il volto era corrugato, pallido e freddo. Era vestito di nero, tutto di nero.</p> <p>«<i>Lasciami in pace</i>» disse l’uomo. Il tono della sua voce sconvolse Viola. Sembrava provenire da una bocca piena di chiodi.</p> <p>«Vattene da qui e <i>lasciami stare</i>».</p> <p>Viola rimase impietrita per un secondo intero. Non era più Viola la Coraggiosa. Era tornata ad essere la quarta dei Vanderbeeker, la capoclasse degli ansiosi, la più timida della 141^a strada. Lasciò cadere la tovaglietta e scese barcollando giù per le scale, Franz alle calcagna. Raggiunse la porta del suo appartamento e se la richiuse alle spalle.</p>
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<p>When she reached the safety of her top bunk, she burst into tears. Big, hiccupping, drowning tears.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">○○○</p> <p>Oliver’s stomach was rumbling when he heard the door down the hall from his bedroom slam and then his litter sisters’ bedroom open and shut. For a millisecond he wondered if everything was okay. When he didn’t hear anything else, he put his book aside and he decided to search the kitchen to see if he could find where his mom was hiding the double chocolate pecan cookies. He opened his bedroom door.</p> <p>Oliver heard sobbing. It sounded like Hyacinth. He tried to ignore it – the cookies were calling him – but then the sobbing intensified.</p> <p>Oliver knocked on Hyacinth and Laney’s bedroom door. There was no answer. He opened the door and peeked inside. Franz sat on the carpet, whimpering. Hyacinth lay on her top bunk, her stuffed penguin held close to her chest.</p> <p>Oliver let himself in and closed the door behind him. “Can I come up?”</p> <p>There was no answer except suppressed sobs, so Oliver took that as a yes and climbed to the top bunk. Hyacinth was a sad sight, with her blotchy face and swollen eyes.</p>	<p>Una volta in salvo sul suo letto a castello, scoppiò in lacrime. Lacrime grosse, singhiozzanti e fragorose.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">○○○</p> <p>Chiuso in camera, Oliver sentì il rumore della porta d’ingresso che sbatteva e la stanza di Sofie e Viola che veniva aperta e richiusa velocemente. Per un millisecondo si chiese se andava tutto bene. Gli brontolava lo stomaco e, non sentendo altri rumori, mise via il libro che aveva in mano e decise di andare a perquisire la cucina per riuscire a scovare il luogo dove la mamma teneva nascosti i cookies doppio cioccolato e noci.</p> <p>Sentì dei singhiozzi. Sembravano di Viola. Provò ad ignorarli – i cookies lo stavano chiamando – ma si fecero più forti.</p> <p>Bussò alla porta della camera di Viola e Sofie. Nessuna risposta. Aprì la porta e dette un’occhiata dentro. Franz se ne stava seduto sul tappeto, piagnucolando. Viola era distesa sul letto, con il pupazzo a forma di pinguino stretto al petto.</p> <p>Oliver entrò nella stanza e si chiuse la porta alle spalle. «Posso entrare?»</p> <p>In risposta gli arrivò solo qualche singhiozzo soffocato, che prese per un sì, e iniziò ad arrampicarsi sul letto a castello. Viola era uno</p>
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<p>“Everything okay?” Oliver asked.</p> <p>No answer.</p> <p>He tried again. “Want to tell me what’s wrong?”</p> <p>Nothing.</p> <p>“Do I need to get my sword and take someone down?”</p> <p>Hyacinth sobbed out something through her tears that sounded like <i>miss beebie mania</i>, which Oliver was certain could not be correct. He gingerly patted Hyacinth’s back and waited for her to be more coherent.</p> <p>“I felt” – <i>hiccup</i> – “like I needed to fix” – <i>sob</i> – “what happened this morning” – <i>sniffle</i> – “with breakfast. Well, I spent <i>hours</i> making him” – <i>hiccup</i> – “a placemat, and then I brought it upstairs to him and” – <i>sniff</i> – “I thought I was Hyacinth the Brave but” – <i>sob</i> – “he was the scariest man I’ve ever seen.”</p> <p>Hyacinth’s eyes brimmed with fresh tears.</p> <p>Oliver scowled, then rolled his shoulders and neck. “I’m going to challenge him a pirate duel.” Oliver demonstrated his hand-swipe technique. “Take that, Beiderman!”</p> <p>hyacinth looked at Oliver with watery eyes.</p> <p>“After I defeat him with my superior pirate skills, we could let Franz loose and have him pee all over his door again. Would that make you feel better?”</p> <p>Franz’s tail thumped once against the carpet.</p> <p>“I don’t know why he heats us so much,” Hyacinth said with a wail.</p>	<p>spettacolo tristissimo, con il viso paonazzo e gli occhi gonfi.</p> <p>«Tutto okay?» chiese Oliver.</p> <p>Nessuna risposta.</p> <p>Provò di nuovo. «Vuoi dirmi cos’è successo?»</p> <p>Ancora niente.</p> <p>«Devo prendere la spada e far a pezzetti qualcuno?»</p> <p>Viola singhiozzò qualcosa tra una lacrima e l’altra che suonava come <i>mi bibi mania</i>. Oliver era sicuro di non aver capito bene e dette qualche piccola pacca sulla schiena della sorella aspettando che diventasse più collaborativa.</p> <p>«Volevo – <i>hic</i> – sistemare – <i>sob</i> – quello che è successo stamani – <i>ecciù</i> – con la colazione. Ci ho messo delle ore a fargli – <i>hic</i> – una tovaglietta, e poi gliel’ho portata di sopra e – <i>ecci</i> – pensavo di essere Viola la Coraggiosa ma – <i>sob</i> – è davvero l’uomo più spaventoso che abbia mai visto». Gli occhi di Viola si riempirono di nuovo di lacrime.</p> <p>Oliver aggrottò le sopracciglia, poi si sgranchì spalle e collo. «Vado a sfidarlo a un duello tra pirati» disse assestando un bel gancio dimostrativo. «Prendi questo Beiderman!»</p> <p>Viola guardò il fratello, gli occhi ancora pieni di lacrime.</p> <p>«Dopo averlo sconfitto con le mie eccellenti doti piratesche, potremmo sciogliere Franz e fargli fare di nuovo pipì davanti alla sua porta. Ti sentiresti meglio così?»</p>
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<p>Oliver deflated. “Maybe it’s best that we move. At least we’ll get away from him.”</p> <p>Hyacinth shook her head sadly. “I love it here. I want things to go back to how they were before. Before we had to be nice to <i>him</i>.” Her eyes began to well up.</p> <p>Oliver, alarmed by the prospect of Hyacinth crying again, suggested that they go downstairs so she could show him her collection of buttons. It was an activity that never failed to cheer her up, even though it bore Oliver to no end. And they went down the stairs to the living room, Oliver remembered something.</p> <p>“Hey, Hyacinth?”</p> <p>“Yeah?”</p> <p>“What did the Beiderman look like, anyway?”</p> <p>Hyacinth paused to think. “Do you remember the movie Uncle Arthur took us to last year? The one where the werewolf creeps out of the cave to attack the unicorn?”</p> <p>“Yeah?”</p> <p>“The Beiderman looked like the werewolf.”</p> <p>“Wow,” Oliver said as he let out the breath he didn’t know he was holding. “Cool.”</p>	<p>Franz batté un colpo di coda sul tappeto.</p> <p>«Non capisco perché ci odia così tanto» gemette Viola.</p> <p>Oliver si sgonfiò. «Forse è meglio se ci trasferiamo. Almeno non avremo più a che fare con lui».</p> <p>Viola scosse la testa triste. «Mi piace tanto stare qui. Voglio che le cose tornino come prima. Prima di dover essere gentili con lui». Gli occhi le si riempirono di nuovo di lacrime.</p> <p>Oliver, allarmato dalla possibilità che si mettesse a piangere di nuovo, le propose di scendere in salotto e di mostrargli la sua collezione di spille. Quello era un passatempo che riusciva sempre a metterla di buon umore, anche se annoiava lui a morte. Mentre scendevano le scale, Oliver si ricordò di una cosa.</p> <p>«Ehi, Viola?»</p> <p>«Sì?»</p> <p>«Ma che aspetto aveva il Beiderman?»</p> <p>Viola ci pensò un attimo su prima di rispondere. «Ti ricordi il film che ci ha portato a vedere lo zio Arthur l’anno scorso? Quello con il licantropo che strisciava fuori dalla grotta per attaccare l’unicorno?»</p> <p>«Sì?!»</p> <p>«Ecco, il Beiderman assomiglia al licantropo».</p> <p>«Wow» disse Oliver lasciando andare il respiro che, senza accorgersene, aveva trattenuto. «Che figata».</p>
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While Oliver was trying to make Hyacinth feel better, Laney received permission from Mama to bring Paganini the bunny upstairs to Miss Josie and Mr. Jeet's place. Laney loved visiting them for many reasons:

#1. Miss Josie made the best jam cookies, with plenty of strawberry jam in the middle, and she never, ever used orange marmalade.

#2. Mr. Jeet always knew what she was saying. He didn't do that awful grownup thing where he looked at her parents or siblings to translate what she had said.

#3. Miss Josie was a terrific dancer, and she was teaching Laney how to lindy hop.

#4. Going into their apartment was like entering an enchanted garden. And Miss Josie let Laney pick flowers anytime she wanted.

Mama and Papa had told Laney that Mr. Jeet had had a stroke two years ago, which meant he sounded and looked a little different than he used to. But that never bothered Laney; he had always been the same to her, and she loved the way he talked nice and slow so she could understand all the words. Isa and Jessie and Oliver told stories about how Mr. Jeet used to give them endless piggyback rides. He would



Mentre Oliver cercava di tirar su il morale a Viola, la mamma dette il permesso a Sofie di salire dalla signora Josie e il signor Jeet insieme al coniglietto Paganini. A Sofie piaceva tantissimo andarli a trovare, per vari motivi:

n°1. La signora Josie faceva i biscotti alla marmellata più buoni in assoluto. Al centro ci metteva un sacco di marmellata alle fragole e non usava proprio mai quella alle arance.

n°2. Il signor Jeet la capiva sempre. Non faceva quella cosa orrenda che facevano sempre gli adulti quando guardavano i suoi genitori o i suoi fratelli per farsi tradurre quello che lei aveva detto.

n°3. La signora Josie era una ballerina fantastica e le stava insegnando lo swing.

n°4. Entrare in casa loro era come entrare in un giardino incantato. In più la signora Josie le faceva cogliere tutti i fiori che voleva.

La mamma e il papà avevano raccontato a Sofie che due anni prima il signor Jeet aveva avuto un ictus e che ora parlava e si muoveva in modo un po' diverso da prima. Ma la cosa non aveva mai preoccupato Sofie; con lei era rimasto il signor Jeet di sempre e le piaceva molto il suo tono lento e gentile che le permetteva di capire tutte le parole. Isa, Jessie e Oliver raccontavano sempre di tutte le volte

play horsie and sleeping bear and friendly dragon. Laney didn't remember that, but it didn't matter. Mr. Jeet was perfect in every way.

Laney lured Paganini into his carrier with a few bits of carrot, then took her time climbing up to the second floor. A few months earlier, she had stumbled going up the stairs and almost fell on Paganini and squashed hi, and Laney did not want *that* to happen again. She made it upstairs without tripping, se the carrier down, and attempted many unsuccessful jumps to reach the doorbell. By her fifth jump, the door swung open and a smiling Miss Josie appeared. Miss Josie had curlers in her hair and fuzzy slippers in her feet. She greeted Laney with a big hug.

“Hello, my beautiful Laney. Come in and have some tea and cookies with Mr. Jeet and me.”

Laney brushed past a large fern and skipped over to Mr. Jeet and climbed into his lap. Mr. Jeet was immaculately dressed in a pressed button-down shirt and crisp black trousers. A large daisy was stuck into his shirt pocket, and a purple bow tie with very thin white striped lay against his throat.

che il signor Jeet li aveva portati al galoppo sulla schiena. Giocava con loro a fare il cavallo, l'orso addormentato e il drago gentile. Sofie non si ricordava di quelle cosa ma non le importava. Il signor Jeet era sempre e comunque perfetto.

Dopo aver attirato Paganini verso la gabbietta usando qualche pezzo di carota, Sofie iniziò senza fretta a salire le scale diretta al secondo piano. Qualche mese prima, era inciampata e per poco non era caduta su Paganini rischiando di schiacciarlo; non voleva che una cosa del genere succedesse di nuovo. Arrivò in cima sana e salva, appoggiò a terra la gabbietta e, invano, fece qualche salto per arrivare al campanello. Al quinto tentativo la porta si spalancò e comparve una sorridente signora Josie che accolse Sofie con un grande abbraccio Aveva dei bigodini tra i capelli e delle pantofole pelose ai piedi.

«Ciao, mia bellissima Sofie. Perché non entri a prendere un po' di tè e biscotti con me e il signor Jeet?»

Sofie oltrepassò di volata la grande felce e saltò in collo al signor Jeet, vestito di tutto punto con la camicia agganciata fino al collo e i pantaloni neri ben stirati. Aveva anche una grande margherita attaccata al taschino della camicia e un papillon a righe bianche sottili intorno al collo.

<p>“Your bow tie is very nice,” Laney commented, followed by, “Does the Beiderman like cheese croissants?”</p> <p>“Cheese-croissants?” Mr. Jeet repeated as he removed the daisy from his pocket and handed it to Laney. “I – don’t – know.” He looked at Miss Josie.</p> <p>“Did you ever meet him?” pressed Laney. She took a deep whiff of the daisy before sticking it behind her ear.</p> <p>Miss Josie looked uncomfortable. “I knew him back before ... Well, never mind that. I remember he used to listen to a lot of music. He had a record player, like us. He loved jazz music.”</p> <p>“I like jazz music,” said Laney.</p> <p>Miss Josie leaned down and kissed Laney’s forehead. “Me too,” she said.</p> <p>Mr. Jeet tugged on one of Laney’s braids. “Is – Paganini – with – you?”</p> <p>“He’s here!” Laney slid off Mr. Jeet’s lap and got the carrier. She unzipped it and the tip of Paganini’s nose emerged. Miss Josie gave Mr. Jeet a sprig of cilantro, and Paganini’s rabbit nose led the way over to the delicious herb, where he plucked it from Mr. Jeet’s hands, and ate it with both efficiency and speed. Mr. Jeet grinned, his smile lopsided.</p> <p>“You – should – train – him,” Mr. Jeet said.</p> <p>“Do – tricks.”</p>	<p>«Il suo papillon è molto carino» commentò Sofie, aggiungendo subito: «Al Beiderman piacciono i croissant al cioccolato?»</p> <p>«Croissant ... al cioccolato?» ripeté il signor Jeet togliendo la margherita dal taschino per porgerla a Sofie. «Io... non... saprei - rispose guardando la signora Josie».</p> <p>«Lo avete mai incontrato?» insistette Sofie dando una bella annusata alla margherita prima di incastrarla dietro l’orecchio.</p> <p>La signoria sembrava a disagio. «Lo conoscevo prima... ma questo non importa. Ricordo che ascoltava sempre tanta musica. Aveva un giradischi, proprio come noi. Gli piaceva molto la musica jazz».</p> <p>«Anche a me piace il jazz» disse Sofie.</p> <p>«Anche a me» disse la signora Josie piegandosi per posarle un bacio sulla fronte.</p> <p>Il signor Jeet le tirò una delle trecce. «C’è... anche...Paganini... con te?»</p> <p>«È proprio qui» rispose Sofie scivolando giù dal signor Jeet e prendendo la gabbietta. La aprì e spuntò il nasino di Paganini. La signora Josie passò al signor Jeet un rametto di coriandolo, e il naso del coniglio si fece strada fino a raggiungere quell’erbetta deliziosa che agguantò con precisione e rapidità. Il signor Jeet fece un sorrisetto, leggermente inclinato da un lato.</p> <p>«Dovresti... proprio... addestrarlo» disse a Sofie. «Insegnarli ... qualche trucco».</p>
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<p>Laney giggled. “Paganini, do tricks! That’s so funny, Mr. Jeet!”</p> <p>Mr. Jeet looked at her with his serious face. “Would – be – fun.”</p> <p>Laney realized that Mr. Jeet was not joking. She imagined her family looking at her in amazement when they saw Paganini do tricks. Then she added a spotlight and a stage and lots of clapping to her imagination.</p> <p>Laney looked at Mr. Jeet with more interest. “What kind of tricks?”</p> <p>Mr. Jeet pulled out another spring of cilantro and said, “Paganini – COME.” The bunny was busy rooting around in a corner behind a ficus plant and paid Mr. Jeet no attention. Mr. Jeet gestured to Laney, and she walked across the room and picked up Paganini and turned him around. Mr. Jeet repeated the command, waving the cilantro. Paganini hopped over right away at the smell of the cilantro and gobbled it up, his back molars crunching away happily.</p> <p>And so the training began. Mr. Jeet instructed Miss Josie to chop a carrot into little bits. These would serve as Paganini’s training tools. Together Mr. Jeet and Laney worked on “COME”, rewarding Paganini with one small piece of carrot every time he successfully completed the command. It was decided that Laney would visit with Paganini every day for training. Big plans were made for a bunny show after Christmas Eve dinner.</p>	<p>La bambina ridacchiò. «Paganini che impara dei trucchi! Che divertente, signor Jeet!»</p> <p>L’uomo la guardò con espressione seria. «Sarebbe ... davvero divertente».</p> <p>Sofie capì che il signor Jeet non stava scherzando. Immaginò la sua famiglia che la guardava sbalordita mentre Paganini mostrava qualche trucco. Aggiunse all’immagine anche un riflettore, un palcoscenico e tanti applausi.</p> <p>Poi guardò il signor Jeet incuriosita. «Che tipo di trucchi?»</p> <p>Il signor Jeet tirò fuori un altro rametto di coriandolo. «Paganini ... VIENI». Il coniglietto era troppo occupato a frugare in un angolo dietro a una pianta di fico e non fece caso all’uomo. Allora il signor Jeet fece un segno a Sofie che attraversò la stanza, prese Paganini e lo girò. Il signor Jeet ripeté il comando, agitando il coriandolo. Il coniglietto saltellò in avanti in direzione del coriandolo e lo divorò subito, con i molari che sgranocchiavano felici in ritirata.</p> <p>E così iniziò l’addestramento. Il signor Jeet dette alla signora Josie il compito di tagliare una carota in piccoli pezzi. Sarebbero serviti come premio durante l’addestramento. Il signor Jeet e Sofie lavorarono insieme sul “VIENI”, ricompensando Paganini con un pezzettino ogni volta che rispondeva in modo giusto al comando. Decisero che Sofie sarebbe salita ogni giorno con Paganini per continuare</p>
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<p>“Can I wear a sparkly dress?” asked Laney. “And shoes with heels that tap like Mama’s shoes?”</p> <p>Mr. Jeet nodded. “Paganini – can – wear – a – bow – tie. I’ll – lend – him – one.”</p> <p>As Laney put Paganini back in the carrier, she turned to Miss Josie and Mr. Jeet. “Did you know we’re moving?” she asked.</p> <p>Miss Josie went silent and Mr. Jeet looked away. “We know,” Miss Josie finally said. “Your papa told us.”</p> <p>“I don’t want to move. Will you still live upstairs?”</p> <p>“Sweetie, I don’t think we can move with you,” Miss Josie replied. “We’re too old to make a big move like that.”</p> <p>“I have an idea. I can help you move. I can carry things downstairs,” Laney suggested.</p> <p>“How about we see what happens. But if we can’t come with you, we’ll visit you, and you can visit us.” Miss Josie’s voice wobbled, and Mr. Jeet’s head bowed lower, tears rolling down his cheeks and splashing onto his pants.</p> <p>Miss Josie walked Laney and Paganini to the door and watched them descend the staircase to</p>	<p>l’addestramento e preparare uno show per la cena della Vigilia.</p> <p>«Posso indossare un vestito con i brillantini?» chiese Sofie. «E le scarpe con i tacchi che battono come quelli della mamma?»</p> <p>Il signor Jeet annuì. «Paganini Può ... indossare ... un ... papillon. Gliene ... presto ... uno ... io».</p> <p>Mentre Sofie rimetteva Paganini nella gabbietta si voltò verso la signora Josie e il signor Jeet. «Sapete che ci stiamo trasferendo?» chiese.</p> <p>La signora Josie tacque mentre il signor Jeet distolse lo sguardo. «Lo sappiamo» disse poi la signora Josie. «Tuo papà ce l’ha detto».</p> <p>«Non voglio trasferirmi. Ci sarete sempre voi al piano di sopra?»</p> <p>«Tesoro, non credo che potremmo trasferirci con voi» le rispose la donna. «Siamo troppo anziani per fare una cosa del genere».</p> <p>«Ho un’idea. Posso aiutarvi io. Posso portarvi le cose giù per le scale» propose Sofie.</p> <p>«Perché non aspettiamo di vedere come vanno le cose. E poi, anche se non possiamo trasferirci con voi, possiamo venirvi a trovare e tu puoi venirci a trovare». La voce della signora Josie esitò un attimo e la testa del signor Jeet si piegò verso il basso mentre le lacrime gli rotolavano lungo le guance cadendo sui pantaloni.</p> <p>La signora Josie accompagnò Sofie e Paganini alla porta; li guardò scendere le scale fino al</p>
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the first floor and safely enter their apartment. Miss Josie closed her own door, then went to her husband and kissed his head.

“It’ll be okay. We’ll be okay,” she whispered to him, even as her own tears betrayed her.

Eight

After a lunch of grab whatever-you can-from-the-fridge followed by an hour of reading a massive science encyclopedia she had dragged home from the library, Jessie needed a break. She took the stairs two at a time to the bedroom in search of Isa. When she opened the door, she found Allegra, their friend from school, standing in the middle of the room wearing a frightful dress that made her look like a giant boysenberry. A bunch of other equally hideous garments were laid out on Isa’s bed.

Jessie shielded her eyes and grimaced. “I’m blind! Too ... much ... tulle ... disguised ... as ... clothes ...”

Allegra harrumphed. “Jess, get a grip. It’s not like I’m going to wear this when I walk the dog.” Allegra gave a regal spin that looked like a move she learned from a terrible girly-girl movie. “This is what you wear for an eight grade semiformal dance.”

primo piano ed entrare sani e salvi nel loro appartamento. Poi chiuse la porta, andò verso il marito e gli posò un baciò sulla testa.

«Andrà tutto bene. Staremo bene» gli sussurrò, anche se le lacrime tradivano le sue parole.

Otto

Dopo un bel pranzo svuotafrigo e un’ora passata a leggere una monumentale enciclopedia scientifica che si era trascinata a casa dalla biblioteca, Jessie aveva bisogno di una pausa. In cerca di Isa, salì al piano di sopra facendo i gradini a due a due. Quando aprì la porta della camera trovò Allegra, una loro amica di scuola, in piedi in mezzo alla stanza con indosso un vestito terribile che la faceva assomigliare a una mora gigante. Un mucchio di vestiti altrettanto orrendi era in bella mostra sul letto di Isa.

Jessie si coprì gli occhi e fece una smorfia. «Sono cieca! Troppo... tulle ... da mettere...addosso...»

Allegra sbuffò esasperata «Controllati Jess. Non ho intenzione di indossarlo per portare fuori il cane» disse facendo un’elegante giravolta che sembrava uscita da uno di quei terribili film da ragazzine. «Questo è quello che

“I think Allegra looks lovely,” Isa said, gazing at Allegra reverently. “Isn’t that amazing that she’s going to the eight grade dance?”

Jessie grunted. “I guess.” She slumped into the beanbag chair.

Allegra looked thoughtfully at Jessie. “Jess, listen up. You could look *so* gorgeous if you wrote something other than those jeans and sweatshirts. I bet if you dressed a little nicer, and maybe used some Farewell Frizz Spray or something to smooth down your hair, an eighth-grader would invite you to the dance too.”

Jessie rolled her eyes to the ceiling. “And that, my friend, is why I’m *not* going to dress differently. Eight grade boys think they’re so cool a dance sounds like torture.” Jessie looked at Isa for affirmation, but her sister wasn’t paying attention.

Isa fingered one of the dresses on the bed. “Hey, can I try this one?” She held up the least abominable of the dresses, a floor-length sleeveless peach-colored dress that had a high waist and fell in soft folds to the ground.

“Sure,” Allegra said. “Jess, feel free to try anything on. That sparkly blue one would look so awesome on you.”

“Never going to happen,” Jessie replied as she picked at her cuticles. The sparkly blue dress

si indossa a un ballo dell’ultimo anno semi formale».

«Secondo me è incantevole» disse Isa fissando Allegra con ammirazione. «Non è fantastico che è stava invitata a un ballo di fine anno?»

«Suppongo» brontolò Jessie lasciandosi cadere sulla poltrona a sacco.

Allegra guardò Jessie pensierosa. «Ascolta Jess. Saresti davvero uno schianto se indossassi qualcosa di diverso a vecchi jeans e felpe. Scommetto che se ti vestissi un po’ più carina, e usassi una schiuma anti-crespo o qualcosa per lisciare i capelli, uno dell’ultimo anno ti inviterebbe di sicuro».

Jessie alzò gli occhi al soffitto. «E proprio per questo non ho alcuna intenzione di vestirmi diversamente. I ragazzi dell’ultimo anno si sentono troppo fighi; andare al ballo mi sembrerebbe una tortura» disse guardando in direzione di Isa per avere una conferma; ma la sorella non la stava considerando.

Isa indicò uno dei vestiti distesi sul letto. «Senti, posso provare questo?» chiese alzando quello meno abominevole, un abito rosa pesca, sbracciato, a vita alta e con pieghe che scendevano soffici fino al pavimento.

«Certo» disse Allegra «Jess, se ti va provane anche te uno. Quello blu con i brillantini ti starebbe benissimo».

«No di certo» rispose Jessie mentre si mordeva le cuticole. Quel vestito poteva

<p>looked like something a six-year-old would wear to an ice-skating competition.</p> <p>“Jess, help me,” Isa said. Jessie got up and helped Isa gently pull the dress down over her head. Jessie smoothed the long skirt and zipped up the back. Isa turned around.</p> <p>“Wow,” Jessie breathed. “You look like a queen. An awesome, kick-butt queen.”</p> <p>Allegra clasped her hands to her chest. “That dress is <i>ahh-mazing</i> on you!” she squealed. “I <i>so</i> wish you could go to the dance too.”</p> <p>Jessie suddenly remembered Benny and their conversation earlier that day. Did Isa <i>want</i> to go to the dance? Generally the twins were in agreement about these types of things. But there Isa was, standing before her, looking so elegant and grown up in the peach gown, not looking a bit appalled by the idea of going to a fancy-pants dance. What had happened? Jessie had meant to mention the thing with Benny from that morning so they could both have a good laugh about it, but now she wasn’t sure if Isa would think it was funny. If Isa went to this dance without her – and with a <i>boy</i> – what would it mean? It would be the first major life event they didn’t experience together.</p> <p>“Isa, seriously,” Jessie said, a little bit louder than she meant to. “We have bigger things to worry about than dances.”</p> <p>“Yeah,” said Isa dreamily, admiring herself from different angles in the mirror, her</p>	<p>indossarlo al massimo una bambina di sei anni per una gara di pattinaggio.</p> <p>«Aiutami Jess» disse Isa. Jessie si alzò e aiutò la sorella a far passare con delicatezza il vestito dalla testa e le chiuse la cerniera sulla schiena. Isa si girò.</p> <p>«Wow» sussurrò Jessie «Sembri una meravigliosa regina. Una che spacca».</p> <p>Allegra si strinse le mani sui fianchi e strillò: «Sei <i>ahh-dorabile!</i> Vorrei tanto che venissi anche te al ballo».</p> <p>Jessie si ricordò all’improvviso della conversazione con Benny quella mattina. Forse Isa voleva davvero andare al ballo? Di solito le gemelle erano sempre d’accordo su questo genere di cose. Ma adesso Isa le stava davanti e sembrava così elegante e adulta in quel vestito pesca e per niente inorridita all’idea di andare a un ballo così formale. Cos’era successo? Sarebbe stato il primo grande evento della sua vita che non avrebbero vissuto insieme.</p> <p>«Isa, sul serio» a voce più alta di quella che pensava «abbiamo cose più importanti a cui pensare del ballo».</p> <p>«Si» le rispose Isa con espressione assorta mentre ammirava la sua immagine allo specchio da diverse angolazioni; con la sua</p>
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<p>impeccable posture making her look stage-ready for Carnegie Hall.</p> <p>“Hello!” Jessie said, waving her hands in front of Isa’s face. “Moving? The Beiderman?”</p> <p>“Whoa,” said Allegra. “Who’s moving? What Beiderman?”</p> <p>Isa snapped out of her reverie and looked at Allegra. “<i>We’re</i> moving. The Beiderman is our landlord, and he isn’t renewing our lease.”</p> <p>“We figure we have until Christmas to convince him to let us stay,” Jessie added.</p> <p>“But that’s only four days away!” Allegra exclaimed. “What’s your landlord’s deal, anyway?”</p> <p>Jessie shrugged. “He can’t take all our noise. Or something.”</p> <p>Allegra planted her hands on her hips. “We need to stop him. Your brownstone is the only reason I don’t run away from home and find new parents.” Allegra’s parents were both pediatricians and spent so much time fixing the health problems of other people’s kids that Allegra believed they’d forgotten they had a daughter of their own.</p> <p>“We tried to make contact with the Beiderman this morning. Did not go well,” Jessie said, then filled Allegra in on the failed breakfast attempt.</p>	<p>postura perfetta sembrava pronta a esibirsi al Carnegie Hall, teatro di fama mondiale.</p> <p>«Ehilà» disse Jessie, agitando le mani davanti al volto di Isa. «Il trasferimento? Il Beiderman?»</p> <p>«Aspetta un attimo» disse Allegra «Chi si trasferisce? Che Beiderman?»</p> <p>Isa si risvegliò dal sogno ad occhi aperti e guardò Allegra. «Noi ci stiamo trasferendo. Il Beiderman è il padrone di casa e non ci rinnova il contratto».</p> <p>«Abbiamo tempo fino a Natale per convincerlo a farci rimanere» aggiunse Jessie.</p> <p>«Ma mancano solo quattro giorni!» esclamò Allegra. «E quale sarebbe il problema di questo tizio?»</p> <p>Jessie scosse le spalle «Non sopporta il nostro rumore. O qualcosa del genere».</p> <p>Allegra si piantò le mani sui fianchi. «Dobbiamo fermarlo. La vostra casa è l’unico motivo per cui non sono ancora scappata di casa per farmi adottare». I genitori dell’amica erano entrambi pediatri e passavano così tanto tempo a occuparsi della salute dei figli degli altri che Allegra era convinta si fossero dimenticati di avere una figlia anche loro.</p> <p>«Abbiamo cercato di creare un contatto con il Beiderman stamani mattina. Ma non è andata bene» disse Jessie; poi, aggiornò Allegra sull’idea della colazione fallita.</p>
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“Here’s what’s going to happen,” Allegra declared. “You’re going to save your home, and here’s how.”

Jessie clamped her mouth shut as Allegra rattled off a number of unreasonable ideas (including one particularly ridiculous suggestion to purchase the whole brownstone – in cash – from the Beiderman), and when Allegra ran out of ideas she talked *again* about the dance and how amazing Isa looked in the gown. Jessie didn’t trust herself to join the conversation, so she slipped out the door without saying anything at all.



Oliver spent a dreadfully boring twenty-three minutes looking through Hyacinth’s button collection. When he left his sister peaceful and preoccupied with a craft project (most likely *another* Christmas gift), he was reminded yet again that he had not figured out Christmas presents. He didn’t know how Hyacinth did it. Just two weeks ago she had made him some type of arm-warmer contraption. She was like a workaholic elf.

Oliver headed up to his bedroom to think about gifts, but when he saw his copy of *Treasure Island* sitting on his desk he had a flash of inspiration to avenge Hyacinth’s honor. He pulled out a fresh sheet of notebook paper,

«Ecco cosa succederà» affermò Allegra. «Voi salverete la vostra casa. Ecco come».

Jessie ascoltò allibita Allegra che la riempiva di un sacco di idee assurde (compresa una particolarmente ridicola che suggeriva di comprare l’intero edificio, in contanti, dal Beiderman). Una volta terminate le idee, Allegra ricominciò a parlare del ballo e di quanto Isa stesse bene con quel vestito.

Jessie non credeva di riuscire a reggere quella conversazione, quindi scivolò fuori dalla camera senza aggiungere altro.



Oliver passò ventitré noiosissimi minuti a guardare tutta la collezione di spille di Viola. Una volta lasciata la sorella tranquilla e concentrata in un progetto (molto probabilmente un altro regalo di Natale) si ricordò di nuovo che non aveva ancora pensato ai regali di Natale. Non riusciva a capire come Violaci riuscisse. Solo due settimane fa gli aveva fatto una sorta di aggeggio scaldabraccia. Era come un elfo stacanovista.

Oliver si diresse verso la sua stanza per concentrarsi sui regali ma quando vide la sua copia de *L’isola del tesoro* appoggiata sulla scrivania ebbe un lampo di ispirazione per vendicare l’onore di Viola. Tirò fuori un foglio

briefly contemplated the content of this letter then wrote the following:

*To the scoundrel on the third floor,
I hope your conscience has
robbed you of sleep. Being mean
will earn you a black spot, and
you know what that means. Be
nice, or watch out. Woe be to
the man who does not heed by
advice.*

*Signed,
Your Greatest Foe*

There, Oliver thought. *Short and to the point.* He was particularly proud of the part about the black spot. In *Treasure Island*, the black spot meant you were guilty of something and would be fully punished. He thought that lent a certain drama to the letter. He knew he should be trying to win over the Beiderman, but how would the upstairs neighbor even know that it was him writing the note anyway? It could be anyone. Oliver had really good handwriting for a nine-year-old.

He cut out letters from his *Amazing Outdoor Adventures* magazine to spell MR. BEIDERMAN, then pasted them onto an envelope, laying them out like the ransom notes he always imagined getting if someone were to steal Franz or Paganini. That would

nuovo da un quaderno, pensò velocemente al contenuto della lettera e scrisse:

*Alla canaglia del terzo piano, mi auguro
Che la sua coscienza le tolga il sonno di notte.
Essere crudele la condurrà solo a una macchia
Nera, e sa bene cosa significa. Sia gentile, o
Si guardi alle spalle. Guai a colui che non
Ascolta questo consiglio.*

*Firmato,
il suo acerrimo nemico*

Ecco qua, pensò Oliver. *Chiaro e conciso.* Era molto orgoglioso soprattutto della parte che parlava della macchia nera che aggiungeva una nota drammatica alla lettera. Ne *L'Isola del tesoro*, la "macchia nera" voleva dire che se uno era colpevole di qualcosa, avrebbe ricevuto una bella punizione. Oliver piegò la lettera in tre e la infilò in una busta. Sapeva che avrebbe dovuto pensare a come convincere il Beiderman, ma in fin dei conti come avrebbe potuto immaginare che era lui l'autore di quel biglietto? Poteva essere chiunque. Nonostante i suoi nove anni, Oliver aveva una bella calligrafia.

Si mise a tagliare le lettere per comporre "Signor Beiderman" dalla rivista *Avventure fuori porta*, poi le incollò sulla busta sistemandole come la richiesta di riscatto che,

<p>strike fear into the Beiderman’s heart, he was sure of it.</p> <p>For the third time that day, a Vanderbeeker kid climbed the stairs to the top floor. Oliver stealthily slipped the letter under the door; then snuck back down the stairs, quiet as a mouse. <i>Oh yeah, who is the man?</i> Let it be known that he, Oliver S. Vanderbeeker, was not to be pushed around when it came to his family.</p> <p>When Oliver reentered his apartment, feeling as smug as a peacock with a full plume of feathers, he ran straight into Jessie.</p> <p>“Do you think I need to dress differently?” Jessie demanded.</p> <p>Oliver winced. This could not end well.</p> <p>“No,” said Oliver with complete honesty, hoping that was the right answer.</p> <p>“Why not?” Jessie asked him belligerently.</p> <p>“Don’t you think my old jeans and stained sweatshirts are gross? Don’t you think I should dress nicer?”</p> <p>Oliver decided to change tactics. “Um ... yes? Maybe you should get nicer clothes?”</p> <p>“So you think I’m a big loser too, huh? You and everyone else,” Jessie snapped.</p>	<p>nella sua immaginazione, avrebbero ricevuto se qualcuno avesse rapito Franz o Paganini. Così era sicuro che avrebbe instillato la paura nel cuore del Beiderman.</p> <p>Per la terza volta quel giorno, uno dei fratelli Vanderbeeker saliva le scale diretto all’ultimo piano. Facendo attenzione a non essere visto, Oliver fece scivolare la lettera sotto la porta, poi sgattaiolò di soppiatto giù per le scale, silenzioso come un topo. <i>E adesso, chi se la fa sotto?</i> Era meglio mettere in chiaro che lui, Oliver S. Vanderbeeker, non era uno di cui prendersi gioco, soprattutto quando si trattava della sua famiglia.</p> <p>Quando Oliver rientrò in casa, trionfante come un pavone dal piumaggio bellissimo, si imbatte subito in Jessie.</p> <p>«Pensi ce dovrei vestirmi in modo differente?» gli chiese la sorella.</p> <p>Oliver trasalì. Quella domanda non poteva portare a niente di buono.</p> <p>«No» disse in totale sincerità, sperando che quella fosse la risposta corretta.</p> <p>«Perché no?» insistette Jessie con tono di sfida «Non pensi che i jeans vecchi e le felpe macchiate che porto siano inguardabili? Non credi che dovrei vestirmi più carina?»</p> <p>Oliver preferì cambiare tattica. «Mhmm ... sì? Forse dovresti comprarti dei vestiti più carini?»</p> <p>«Quindi mi consideri anche tu una sfigata eh? Come tutti gli altri del resto» disse Jessie a denti stretti.</p>
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<p>“Why don’t you tell me what you want me to say so I can say it and go on with my life,” Oliver shot back.</p> <p>“Sorry.” Jessie didn’t look or sound worry.</p> <p>“Well, go eat some ice cream or get a chocolate croissant from Castleman’s or something.”</p> <p>Jessie’s eyes flashed. Apparently that was yet <i>another</i> wrong time for Oliver to say, although he couldn’t imagine why. Chocolate always cheered up his sisters. Oliver inched against the hallway wall, trying to give Jessie as much space as possible.</p> <p>“Listen, I’m an innocent bystander here,” Oliver entreated, hands held up in surrender. He disappeared into his bedroom and shut the door. Two seconds later, he opened and door just wide enough for his hand to sneak out and hang a “Don’t Bother the Beast” sign on his doorknob before closing it soundly again.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">○○○</p> <p>Jessie stared at Oliver’s door and the ridiculous sign hanging from the doorknob. She sighed. She really did want a chocolate croissant – maybe two – but she <i>did not</i> want to go back to Castleman’s. she wanted to lie in</p>	<p>«Perché non mi dici direttamente cosa vuoi che ti dica, così che te lo dico e continuo a farmi gli affari miei» rispose secco Oliver.</p> <p>«Scusa». L’espressione e il tono di Jessie non sembravano molto dispiaciuti.</p> <p>«Okay, allora vai a prenderti un di gelato o un croissant al cioccolato dei Castelman, o quello che ti pare».</p> <p>Jessie lo fulminò con lo sguardo. Sembrava proprio che Oliver avesse detto l’ennesima cosa sbagliata, anche se non riusciva a capire perché. La cioccolata metteva sempre di buonumore le sorelle. Si spostò lentamente verso la parete così da aumentare lo spazio tra lui e la sorella.</p> <p>«Ascolta, sono solo uno spettatore innocente qui» disse Oliver con tono supplichevole alzando le mani in segno di resa. Poi, scomparve nella sua stanza e chiuse la porta. Due secondi dopo, aprì di nuovo la porta quel tanto che bastava per mettere la mano fuori e appendere il cartello “Non disturbare la bestia” alla maniglia della porta; poi richiuse con attenzione la porta.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">○○○</p> <p>Jessie fissò la porta di Oliver e la ridicola scritta attaccata alla maniglia. Sospirò. Voleva davvero un bel croissant al cioccolato – anzi due – ma non poteva tornare dai Castleman.</p>
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<p>bed under the covers and feel miserable about life,</p> <p>Jessie’s bedroom door opened, and Isa and Allegra emerged, back in their regular clothes. Jessie sighed with relief and took a few deep, calming breaths, now they could go back to concentrating on what really mattered, like saving their home.</p> <p>“Jess, we’re going to Castleman’s for a croissant. Come with us,” said Isa.</p> <p>“NO!” Jessie yelled, her heart rate kicking up. “I mean, yes. I mean, NO. I mean, don’t you think we should be brainstorming more about the Beiderman?”</p> <p>“We’re just running out for a few minutes. You’re the one who always quotes that scientific study about how the chemicals in chocolate help the mind work,” Isa pointed out. “Besides, I want to talk to Benny.”</p> <p>Jessie’s stomach dropped. She could not, absolutely could not, go back to Castleman’s today after what had happened that morning with Benny. Especially since she hadn’t told Isa that Benny wanted to ask her to the dance. Especially since it now seemed that Isa <i>did</i> want to go to the dance. Especially since Jessie did not want Isa to go to the dance.</p> <p>“I’ve got a headache. And I have my science fair research to do. And I need to do some sit-ups. You know, keep the body fit.” <i>Stop</i></p>	<p>Voleva solo starsene a letto, sotto le coperte a deprimersi.</p> <p>Aprì la porta di camera e spuntarono Isa e Allegra, tornate nei vestiti di sempre. Jessie tirò un sospiro di sollievo e prese qualche bel respiro per rilassarsi. Adesso potevano concentrarsi di nuovo su ciò che era veramente importante, come salvare la loro casa.</p> <p>«Jess, andiamo dai Castleman a comprare un croissant. Vieni con noi?» le chiese Isa.</p> <p>«NO!» urlò Jessie con il cuore che batteva all’impazzata. «Cioè, sì. Cioè, NO. Cioè, non pensi che dovremmo mettere insieme un po’ di idee per il Beiderman?»</p> <p>«Usciamo solo per qualche minuto. Sei tu quella che ita sempre quella ricerca scientifica che dice che le sostanze della cioccolata aiutano la concentrazione» le fece notare Isa. «E poi, devo parlare con Benny».</p> <p>Jessie si sentì rivoltare lo stomaco. Non poteva nella maniera più assoluta tornare dai Castleman dopo quello che era successo con Benny la mattina. Soprattutto visto che non aveva ancora raccontato a Isa che lui voleva invitarla al ballo. Soprattutto visto che adesso sembrava proprio che lei volesse andarci. E soprattutto visto che lei non voleva che sua sorella ci andasse.</p> <p>«Ho un po’ di mal di testa. E devo completare la relazione del mio esperimento. E devo fare un po’ di addominali. Sai, per tenere il corpo</p>
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<p><i>talking, stop talking stop talking</i>, Jessie demanded of herself.</p> <p>“Jess, is everything ... al right?” Isa ‘s brow furrowed in confusion.</p> <p>Jessie nodded. She didn’t trust herself to speak anymore.</p> <p>“We’ll be right back. Then we can think more about the Beiderman. We’ll get you a chocolate croissant.” Isa and Allegra stepped away from Jessie, Isa still eyeing her sister critically.</p> <p>Jessie attempted to smile, which only made Isa look more concerned. Jessie scooted into their bedroom and shut the door. She dropped down onto her bed, covered her head with a pillow, and let out a low, tortured groan.</p>	<p>allenato». <i>Smetti di parlare, smetti di parlare, smetti di parlare</i>, ordinò a sé stessa.</p> <p>«Jess, va ... tutto bene?» le chiese Isa con espressione confusa.</p> <p>Jessie si limitò ad annuire. Era meglio se non diceva più niente.</p> <p>«Torniamo tra poco. E poi possiamo pensare a qualcosa per il Beiderman. Ti prendiamo un croissant». Mentre si allontanava con Allegra, Isa continuò a guardare dubbiosa verso la sorella. Jessie provò a farle un sorriso, ma riuscì solo a farla preoccupare ancora di più. Si infilò in fretta in camera e chiuse la porta. Poi, si abbandonò sul letto, si coprì la testa col cuscino e si lasciò andare a un gemito profondo e disperato.</p>
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APPENDIX 2

TRADURRE LA FAMIGLIA VANDERBEEKER: ADATTARE LA COMUNICAZIONE

La letteratura per ragazzi è stata spesso sottostimata, fino ad essere definita provocatoriamente “invisibile” da alcuni studiosi, perché considerata una raccolta di libri scritti con parole “semplici” e con l’unico scopo di insegnare ai lettori come parlare, scrivere e comportarsi mentre termini come “piacere” e “divertimento” venivano associati a una povertà di contenuto. In passato, alcuni scrittori di libri destinati principalmente a un pubblico non adulto celavano la loro identità dietro l’anonimità o falsi nomi, così da preservare la loro identità letteraria. Nonostante questa posizione secondaria rispetto alla letteratura considerata “canonica”, scritta per lettori adulti, un numero sempre maggiore di ricercatori e autori ha iniziato a porre sempre più accento sulla complessità insita dietro a un prodotto letterario destinato a un pubblico giovane. Sono stati organizzati corsi accademici e conferenze e sono stati istituiti premi e associazioni dedicati alla letteratura per ragazzi. Queste iniziative, però, da una parte hanno sottolineato la qualità di questi prodotti, “letterari” e “artistici” a tutti gli effetti, dall’altra hanno rinforzato l’idea già molto diffusa che si tratta di base di una letteratura “diversa”, “altra” rispetto a quella canonica, più “seria”.

La complessità della letteratura per ragazzi si struttura in un insieme composito di elementi che riguardano sia aspetti formali che contenutistici, i quali rendono difficile fornire una definizione esaustiva di cosa sia effettivamente la letteratura per ragazzi così come l’effettivo lettore di riferimento. Si possono delineare caratteristiche di base perché termini come “infanzia” e “adolescenza” abbracciano un gruppo di lettori non solo numeroso ma, soprattutto, in continuo fermento evolutivo. L’età anagrafica può essere un indicatore utile per evidenziare capacità acquisite e bisogni specifici, ma risulta relativo perché si scontra inevitabilmente con la dinamicità che contraddistingue i bambini e i ragazzi, sia nella loro dimensione individuale che di gruppo. Inoltre, lo scrittore, così come il traduttore, di libri per ragazzi non può non tener conto del fatto che tra i fruitori non ci sono solo giovani ma anche adulti tra i quali genitori, insegnanti, librai, bibliotecari ed editori, che, nella maggior parte dei casi, dettano legge sia sull’acquisto sia sulla

fruizione effettiva di un prodotto. Un prodotto letterario destinato a un giovane lettore rientra ormai in un circuito editoriale che si è sviluppato, e continua a svilupparsi, così da essere diventato ormai un fenomeno globale, di portata nazionale e internazionale, le cui vendite e la cui produzione sono incrementate esponenzialmente negli ultimi anni.

Il progetto alla base della presente tesi si prefigge come obiettivo principale quello di mostrare la complessità e la ricchezza che si possono riscontrare in un libro per ragazzi, partendo da una serie di riflessioni contenutistiche, stilistiche e traduttologiche sviluppate intorno al progetto di traduzione che ho intrapreso del libro *The Vanderbeekers of 141st street*. Si tratta del primo volume di una serie creata dalla scrittrice americana Karina Yan Glaser e destinata principalmente a un pubblico di lettori tra i 7 e gli 11 anni. La struttura della tesi si propone di ricreare le varie fasi che si sono succedute nel mio avvicinarmi al processo traduttivo, da una fase iniziale più teorica, determinante per delineare un quadro di riferimento generale, a una più pratica, fondamentale per la scelta delle strategie traduttive. Nel Capitolo 1 vengono sottolineati alcuni degli elementi principali della letteratura per ragazzi seguendo la regola delle cinque W: *What*, cosa si intende per “letteratura per ragazzi”; *Who*, chi sono alcuni degli attori principali coinvolti; *When* e *Where*, quanto il contesto influenza la creazione e la riuscita dell’opera; *How*, che stile utilizzare e *Why*, per quale motivo, o motivi, scrivere. Nel Capitolo 2 viene presentato il libro oggetto di traduzione, contestualizzato come prodotto editoriale e analizzato tramite alcune tematiche che si rivelano molto attuali, come il far parte di una famiglia e di una comunità, e che abbracciano anche questioni di genere. Per sviluppare quest’ultimo punto viene proposta una riflessione comparata tra alcune delle protagoniste di *The Vanderbeeker of 141st street* e quelle di *Little Women* di Louisa May Alcott, accomunate da esperienze che le rendono perfette per dare un taglio di genere all’analisi contenutistica. Infine, i Capitoli 3 e 4 sono dedicati all’analisi delle strategie traduttive che sono state impiegate per far fronte al processo traduttivo messo in difficoltà da elementi linguistici e culturali propri del testo di partenza quali giochi di parole, allitterazioni, modi di dire, nomi di persona, luoghi e festività.

La traduzione di libri per ragazzi, così come la sua scrittura, è stata spesso oggetto di semplificazioni, considerata come un’attività ricreativa e povera di valore artistico in quanto diretta verso testi già considerati di per sé semplici. Eppure tradurre per ragazzi richiede un impegno pari, se non maggiore, rispetto alla traduzione per adulti; il traduttore

è chiamato ad operare una serie di scelte, stilistiche e formali, che si complicano davanti ad un lettore in parte ancora inesperto, in parte molto esigente vista la sua insofferenza di fronte a complicazioni fuori luogo o semplificazioni così eccessive da risultare irrispettose. Il lettore “bambino” non si aspetta di essere aiutato ma guidato nella lettura, non si aspetta un testo che gli fornisca tutte le risposte ma che lo accompagni nell’affrontare le domande che un libro può suscitare, non si aspetta un testo che mortifichi le sue abilità di comprensione ma che lo stimoli rendendolo parte attiva e protagonista dell’esperienza di lettura. Da qui hanno origine una serie di considerazioni che il traduttore non può evitare tra le quali se e come trattare temi spesso considerati tabù, per esempio la morte, il pericolo o la differenza, e se e come gestire elementi culturali, che possono essere mantenuti nel testo di arrivo, creando un effetto di “straniamento” nel lettore, o possono essere adattarli alla cultura di arrivo, rendendo il testo più vicino all’esperienza del lettore target così da promuoverne un coinvolgimento emotivo maggiore. Il lettore, nonostante la sua giovane età, non ha bisogno di essere protetto da tutto ciò che si pensa contaminare la sua supposta “innocenza” e un suo sviluppo, fisico ed emotivo, giusto e sereno. Si tratta, in realtà, di un essere altamente recettivo all’ambiente circostante e ancora aperto alle possibilità del “diverso” del “nuovo”; apertura che diventa sempre più difficile da mantenere con l’avanzare dell’età e il sommarsi di doveri ed esperienze. Il traduttore di libri per ragazzi, in primis scrittore, deve affrontare le difficoltà comportate dallo scarto generazionale che inevitabilmente esiste tra lui e il suo lettore di riferimento.

La traduzione, un atto creativo a tutti gli effetti in quanto non mera “copia” o “imitazione” di un testo di partenza, è un atto comunicativo che si basa fundamentalmente nel rendere comprensibile un messaggio. La comprensibilità e la leggibilità rappresentano, quindi, due concetti di riferimento essenziali che rischiano, però, di essere spesso scambiati per una semplificazione eccessiva della forma e dei significati di un testo che non “deve essere” ma “deve *poter* essere” essere leggibile e, quindi, comprensibile. I dialoghi forniscono un esempio interessante in questo senso perché devono essere “recitabili”, resi vicini all’esperienza quotidiana del lettore così da suonare fluenti e risultare “naturali”. Un altro elemento indice della leggibilità e comprensibilità di un testo è la sua coerenza interna, la quale abbraccia sia il suo aspetto semantico-contenutistico che di strutturazione e organizzazione delle informazioni. La traduzione è una questione

di potere, non solo esercitato da revisori ed editori che impongono restrizioni a cui un traduttore fa fatica a non attenersi, ma dal traduttore stesso che, in base alle varie strategie e procedure traduttive influenza e direzione gli esiti della lettura e comprensione del testo. La traduzione si lega, infatti, anche a una questione di responsabilità da parte del traduttore che è chiamato a giustificare e a difendere l'approccio adottato nel rendere un testo da una lingua e cultura di partenza a una lingua e cultura di arrivo. Il traduttore è, inoltre, responsabile anche nei confronti dell'autore del testo di partenza, verso il quale deve scegliere quanto e come mantenersi "fedele". Spesso questa "fedeltà" viene confusa con la resa letterale di un testo quando, in realtà, si realizza nel "rispetto" che si nutre nell'approcciarvisi. La traduzione implica inevitabilmente una certa manipolazione sintattica, lessicale e, di conseguenza, semantica, ma è proprio il grado di questa manipolazione che indica se il testo di arrivo rappresenta un'interpretazione o una violazione del testo di partenza. Il traduttore si può prendere la libertà, guidata da una necessaria consapevolezza operativa, di cambiare, ampliare, cancellare, abbreviare alcune parti del testo. Le strutture passive, per esempio, risultano particolarmente formali per un lettore italiano e, quindi, vengono spesso sostituite con forme attive o con costruzioni con il "si" impersonale ("Hyacinth always had her best ideas when surrounded by her favorite things" > "A Viola le idee migliori venivano quando si circondava delle sue cose preferite"). Come accennato in precedenza, tradurre è una questione di rispetto, soprattutto nei confronti di un destinatario, le cui potenzialità, più che le abilità, vengono spesso sottovalutate e sminuite, che ha diritto ad un testo che rispecchi la sua natura dinamica, creativa, instabile e che lo faccia sentire protagonista di una continua sperimentazione e interazione. Il livello linguistico e l'esperienza acquisita e acquisibile dal lettore devono essere tenuti di conto in modo da stimolare la sua curiosità. Nel caso di elementi considerati ancora troppo difficili, per esempio, la loro eliminazione sembra essere sempre la soluzione più adatta; i bambini amano essere sfidati e hanno bisogno di avere tempo e spazio per esplorare, come stessero partecipando a un gioco con vari livelli da esplorare.

Per andare incontro a questo carattere ancora "a-morfo" di un giovane lettore, il traduttore stesso deve aprirsi alla sperimentazione e cercare soluzioni creative che riescano ad inglobare le restrizioni poste dagli editori, il rispetto verso l'autore del testo di partenza ma, soprattutto, i bisogni del lettore target. La creatività è, dunque, un elemento

fondamentale nell'approcciarsi alla traduzione di un libro per ragazzi dove si rende spesso necessario ricercare soluzioni alternative, ma non per questo riduttive. Nel caso delle descrizioni, per esempio, risulta difficile tradurre i vari elementi alla lettera; una soluzione interessante potrebbe essere quella suggerita da Morini (2016:19) di comprenderne il significato, immaginarlo e poi riscriverlo. Anche i nomi propri di persona e i riferimenti culturali quali cibo, riferimenti intertestuali ed elementi geografici ben precisi rappresentano un'altra sfida per il traduttore che non può permettersi di optare meccanicamente per lasciare questi elementi invariati, come tende a succedere quando il lettore target è un adulto. Nel caso dei nomi propri di persona in *The Vanderbecker of 141st*

street, ho lasciato tendenzialmente invariati i nomi dei vari personaggi secondari mentre per i principali ho mantenuto i nomi abbastanza riconoscibili per un lettore italiano, come Oliver, Isa, Jessie, Paganini e ho cambiato quelli che avrebbero rallentato inutilmente la fluidità di lettura o che si legavano ad altre espressioni del testo. Per esempio, ho cambiato "Hyacinth" con "Viola", mantenendo il riferimento a un fiore e scegliendo un nome che viene utilizzato anche in America, mentre ho sostituito "Laney" con "Sophie", il cui suono sembra ricordare sempre una bambina piccola e tenera, per poter rendere una serie di espressioni che sarebbe stato un peccato scollegare dal personaggio come "Laney-bean" > "Sofficino", "spill the beans" > "fare una soffiata".

The Vanderbecker of 141st street è un testo estremamente ricco dal punto di vista artistico e stilistico. Le illustrazioni che accompagnano il testo rappresentano un ulteriore elemento ricorrente nella letteratura per ragazzi, soprattutto nei testi per i più giovani, che agevolano la lettura, stimolano la curiosità e nutrono la multi-sensorialità del lettore, rappresentando, al contempo, una sfida per il traduttore che, per coerenza, deve farsi guidare nelle sue scelte traduttive da quello che viene mostrato nell'immagine. Da un punto di vista stilistico, invece, il testo è ricco di giochi di parole, della musicalità di espressioni onomatopoeiche e giochi allitterativi ed espressioni idiomatiche, che rappresentano il modo arbitrario con cui ogni cultura organizza, articola e categorizza la realtà. Non mancano le espressioni informali proprie di un linguaggio "di strada", vicino all'esperienza quotidiana dei lettori, dove il tono e il registro rendono effettivamente verosimiglianti le situazioni vissute dai vari personaggi. Ho scelto di affrontare queste sfide traduttive cercando di perdere il minor numero di elementi e riferimenti possibile,

sostituendoli o compensandoli. Nel caso di “A familiar scuffling was heard outside with”, per esempio, ho tradotto il verso “scuffling” con “stropicciare” (“Dall’esterno giunse uno stropiccio di piedi familiare”) così mantenere il riferimento al suono concitato di scarpe in movimento. Allo stesso modo, nel caso dell’espressione “What a punk!” usata da Oliver come insulto verso il signor Beiderman, il padrone di casa che vuole cacciarli sotto Natale, ho perso “qualcosa”, come i possibili riferimenti culturali di “punk”, ma ho mantenuto l’insulto usando l’espressione “Che sfigato!”, condivisa dai giovani italiani. Le perdite sono inevitabili nel processo traduttivo, ma, come visto in passaggi precedenti, spesso possono essere compensate utilizzando elementi alternativi che permettono di renderle parziali e non complete. Nel caso di “‘I’m sure Señor Paz will right appreciate these,’ Mr. Jones replied, tucking the bag carefully into his pocket. He said *sure* the same way Hyacinth said *shore*”, il signor Jones imita la pronuncia spagnola per giocare sul nome del cane (*Señor Paz*) pronunciando “sure” come “shore”; non essendo possibile mantenere questo riferimento nel testo di arrivo ho scelto di non perdere completamente questo riferimento e ho cambiato “sicuro” con “seguro” (“Sono *seguro* che al señor Paz piaceranno moltissimo” le rispose il signor Jones sistemandosi per bene il sacchetto in tasca).

Tra le strategie operative che ho utilizzato per approcciare il testo di partenza si possono ritrovare quelle definite da Baker (2001:289) come universali traduttivi: la normalizzazione, l’equivalenza e la semplificazione. La punteggiatura, il lessico, lo stile, la struttura sintattica e testuale devono essere spesso adattati al sistema linguistico della cultura di arrivo affinché il testo possa essere riconoscibile e confermare alcune aspettative del lettore target. Cambiare l’ordine degli elementi di una frase diventa, quindi, un atto necessario. Ci sono casi in cui alcuni termini necessitano di essere resi maggiormente espliciti per evocare nel lettore di arrivo quanti più rimandi possibili rispetto a quelli visualizzati dal lettore del testo di partenza. Ho ampliato, quindi, alcuni passaggi come, ad esempio, “her impeccable posture making her look stage-ready for Carnegie Hall”, dove a Carnegie Hall ho aggiunto l’incisivo “teatro di fama mondiale”, o come “who lived in Westchester” dove ho aggiunto alcune indicazioni spaziali come “più a nord” (rispetto a New York), per non lasciare un riferimento troppo oscuro per il lettore ed evitare di eliminare completamente un elemento che ricorda l’ambientazione straniera della storia. La semplificazione intesa da Baker può essere di tre tipi: semantica, lessicale

e stilistica. Può comportare una trasposizione sintattica, ovvero uno spostamento di natura prettamente grammaticale, di alcuni elementi testuali come in caso di un verbo che diventa un aggettivo (“Christmas Eve dinner rivaled Thanksgiving dinner in scope and quality”> “la cena doveva essere tanto buona ed abbondante quanto quella per la festa del ringraziamento”). In altri casi può comportare, invece, la frammentazione di una frase o l’unione di frasi diverse per rendere il ritmo del discorso più fluido alle orecchie del lettore secondo le norme linguistiche della sua cultura di appartenenza. L’equivalenza, infine, rappresenta un concetto estremamente controverso che si trova al centro di un dibattito ancora al centro di studi linguistici e traduttologici che vede come protagonisti da una parte l’”equivalenza”, l’adattamento, e dall’altra lo “straniamento”. Scegliere se orientare la propria traduzione verso il lettore di arrivo o verso il testo di partenza è una questione estremamente delicata e messa continuamente in discussione causa, in primis, il fatto che risulta impossibile ricreare un “effetto” nel lettore di arrivo perfettamente sovrapponibile a quello sperimentato dal lettore del testo di partenza.

La ricchezza a cui ho fatto fino a ora riferimento, in modo più o meno implicito, non si esaurisce solo a un livello stilistico ma si può ritrovare anche in alcune tematiche centrali in *The Vanderbeekers of 141st street* tra le quali la famiglia e la comunità. La famiglia Vanderbeeker vive nel distretto newyorkese di Harlem, in un quartiere dove tutti si conoscono e fanno parte di una “rete” sociale che si interseca inevitabilmente nella quotidianità di ogni individuo. I cinque bambini Vanderbeeker, per esempio, trascorrono molto tempo con i propri vicini e quando escono di casa per fare qualche commissione difficilmente non si fermano a salutare qualcuno. Proprio per questo motivo quando vengono a sapere dai genitori che il loro padrone di casa, il signor Beiderman, vuole cacciarli di casa a pochi giorni dalle festività natalizie senza un motivo specifico, rischiano di perdere non solo la loro casa, intesa come le quattro mura domestiche, quanto la loro quotidianità, la loro identità, il senso di appartenenza e di condivisione che hanno creato con tutto il vicinato, dal vecchio postino amico di famiglia al panettiere di fiducia che non manca mai di regalar loro qualche biscotto. Nelle società occidentali che si basano sempre più sulla valorizzazione dell’individuo, parlare di famiglia, più o meno allargata, e di comunità non risulta per niente banale o scontato. Ciononostante, quello che rende, tuttavia, autentica la storia della famiglia Vanderbeeker è il fatto che i personaggi oltre a cercare un modo per convincere il signor Beiderman a farli rimanere,

affrontano anche “drammi” personali che mettono in discussione la loro soggettività. E proprio in questi singoli cammini di formazione si ritrovano anche tematiche care alle rivendicazioni femministe quali .il diritto all’essere diversi ma equamente rispettati, alla piena realizzazione di sé, alla possibilità di scelta e a coltivare la propria autostima. Viola, ad esempio, scopre di essere coraggiosa, non tanto in quanto forte come suo fratello, ma in quanto generosa ed altruista, mentre Isa e Jessie, le due gemelle, scoprono che il loro legame di “sorelle” va ben oltre l’essere esteticamente identiche, ma si realizza e si potenzia nel riconoscersi diverse e nell’accettarsi e nell’amarsi proprio per quella diversità che le rende uniche e necessarie l’una dell’altra.

Una delle riflessioni più interessanti in cui mi sono imbattuta durante la lettura di saggi e testi che affrontano l’universo multiforme della letteratura per ragazzi è quella che si sofferma sul suo scopo, sul perché scrivere per un pubblico giovane di lettori, se per impartire lezioni tramite morali, più o meno esplicite, o se per far divertire. A lungo i testi destinati all’infanzia sono stati considerati strumenti prettamente educativi che dovevano servire per veicolare valori edificanti, modelli giusti e comportamenti appropriati. Negli ultimi anni si è posto, invece, un accento sempre più forte sull’aspetto ludico della lettura che non per forza esclude la possibilità di apprendere dal libro informazioni che ci possano aiutare nel gestire la realtà quotidiana. Il lettore, nonostante l’età anagrafica, deve essere lasciato libero di giocare, sperimentare con il testo, di trarre da esso ciò che vuole, ciò di cui ha bisogno o che ha senso per lui in quella precisa fase della sua vita. Non a caso, un libro per l’infanzia può essere apprezzato anche da un pubblico di adolescenti o di adulti. Avere possibilità di scelta vuol dire essere liberi, di essere, di *poter* essere. A tale proposito, Daniel Pennac (2006) formula quelli che chiama i diritti del lettore tra cui compaiono proprio il diritto a non leggere un libro, a non finirlo, a saltare alcuni passaggi così come a rileggere un libro già letto.