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The Crayon Beetle

Liz Appel

I was a very shy child. There were no other children on my block to play with, and my sister was too young to be of any use as a playmate. For a long time, the only people I came in contact with were adults, so when I started school I really didn't know how to act around the other kids. Boys were the hardest to handle. They were noisy, and dirty, and they scared me to death. I don't think that I got up the nerve to even talk to one until I was eight or nine years old. Of course, in school I always had to sit next to a boy, and I would spend most of the day worrying about what he was going to do next. I don't think I learned very much, and I certainly suffered through some needless traumas.

In first grade I sat next to Billy, who had a passion for drawing race cars while making the appropriate sound effects. He also had a habit of borrowing my crayons and then breaking them. Because of Billy, art was not my favorite subject. One day, we were handed big sheets of manila paper and told to draw pictures of boats. Although I knew that Billy would probably break some of my crayons, he didn't know what kind of noises boats made, so at least there would be a little silence. I began to poke around in my desk looking for my crayons. I found them at the back, but then my eye caught something else. There, in the very darkest corner, was a big, black beetle.

I froze. I didn't know what to do. If I left the beetle in my desk it might crawl out and bite me. Or, worse than that, it might stay where it was and have baby beetles! Of course I certainly wasn't going to reach in there and get it out, either. Maybe it was just my imagination, I thought. "Maybe if I wait a minute and then look again, it'll be gone." I waited, and then I looked again, and the beetle hadn't moved at all. It was still there, shining blackly. That bug absolutely terrified me, but I was also worried that a bug in my desk might mean that it wasn't clean or that I had germs. I sat glued to the chair while these thoughts whirled through my mind. Finally, I remembered our teacher. She could take care of it for me! It seemed to take forever to get to her desk, and then, when I reached it, I didn't quite know what to say. "Mrs. Baker," I whispered into her ear, "Mrs. Baker, there's a beetle in my desk!"

Mrs. Baker seemed to take it very well. She just said, "William, Elizabeth says that there is a bug in her desk—would you remove it, please?"

I stood at the front of the room while the whole class watched Billy paw around looking for my beetle. I thought that he must be the bravest boy in the world. At last he stood up and, with a wide grin on his face, announced loudly, "It's just a piece of black crayon paper!"

I don't remember how I got back to my seat—I think that I must have blacked out, because the next thing that I remember is me drawing boats with a very red face, while the entire class giggled. Billy kind of took a fancy to me after that—I think he thought that someone ought to look after me. And, the next time that he borrowed my black crayon, I let him keep it.

BALLOONS

Dan Lillard

Shimmering globs of
suns, sunrises, sunsets;
Even rainbows, really.
Yes. . . .
Sweet, wet, laughing rainbows.

