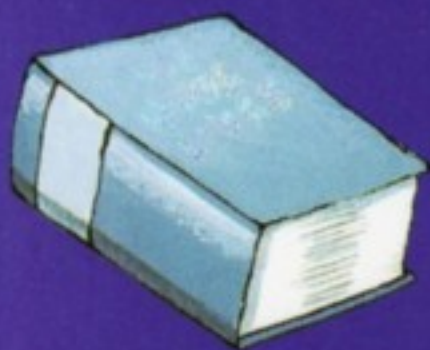


STEPPING STONES™

a full-color chapter book

Mystery

The Ink Drinker

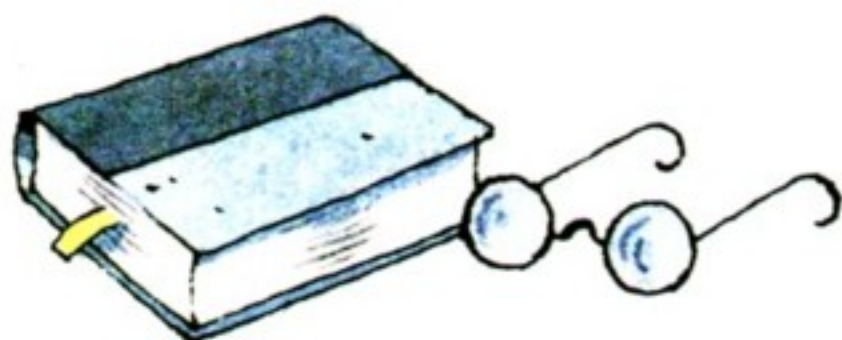


Éric Sanvoisin
illustrations by
Martin Matje



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The Hiding Place



My father owns a bookstore. He loves books. He devours them like an ogre. All day and long into the night, he reads. It's an obsession. There's no cure, but our family doctor doesn't seem to worry.

Every evening, I find a new pile of books at our home. They're everywhere—even in the bathrooms. But it's useless to complain. With

Dad, books are always welcome. He speaks to them as though they were people. He gives them first names and calls them "my little bookies." Every book is his special friend.

As for me, I have no special friend. And books definitely don't qualify. I hate them. You see, I may look like my dad, but deep inside we are very different people. Mom pre-

tends not to notice this because she loves us both. Can you believe that she won't even come to my rescue when Dad forces me to read?

Summer vacation has just started and, to keep busy, I'm helping in the bookstore. I'm not allowed to do much, though. Dad won't let me tidy



up or even touch anything. He says paper doesn't last long in my hands. I guess I do like the sound of paper being torn. It's like music to my ears.

So I watch out for shoplifters. It's the only fun thing to do in the bookstore. But each time a book ends up in the pocket of a thief, I keep quiet. It pleases me to know that there's one less book! The problem is, there are hardly any shoplifters, since my dad almost always spots a thief as soon as one enters the store.

I end up spending most of my time observing the customers. I know all the regulars and all their little habits. Some sniff the books as though they were selecting a bouquet of roses. Some choose any old book



Mystery

STEPPING STONES™

a full-color chapter book

Odilon hates to read. He's bored hanging out in his father's bookstore. But then he sees a mysterious customer sucking the words right out of books with a straw! Odilon follows the ink-drinking vampire to his secret lair. Will he get sucked into the ink drinker's strange world?



"Matje's art, like some whacked-out William Joyce and Lane Smith collaboration, casts just the right shadow over this happily dark adventure."

—*The New York Times Book Review*

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