

ELISE BROACH

author of *Shakespeare's Secret*



MASTERPIECE

illustrated by Kelly Murphy

Great artists come in all shapes and sizes—even different species!



A Family Emergency

Home, for Marvin's family, was a damp corner of the cupboard beneath the kitchen sink. Here, a leaking pipe had softened the plaster and caused it to crumble away. Just behind the wall, Marvin's family had hollowed out three spacious rooms, and, as his parents often remarked, it was a perfect location. It was warm, because of the hot-water pipes embedded in the wall; moist, to make burrowing easy; and dark and musty, like all the other homes the family had lived in. Best of all, the white plastic wastebasket that loomed on one side offered a constant litter of apple cores, bread crumbs, onion skins, and candy wrappers, making the cupboard an ideal foraging ground.

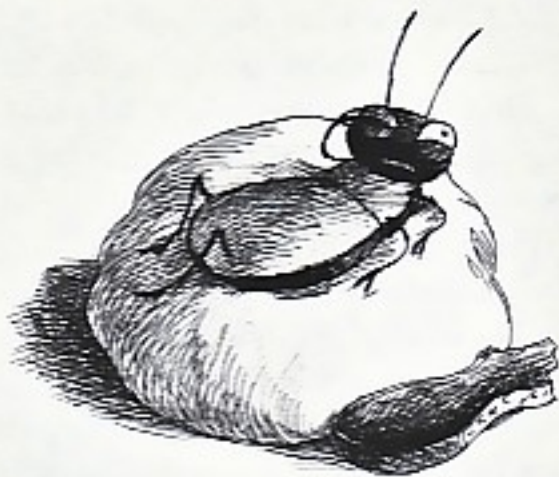
Marvin and his relatives were beetles. They had shiny black shells, six legs, and excellent night vision. They were medium-sized, as beetles go, not much bigger than a raisin. But they were very agile: good at climbing walls, scurrying across countertops, and slipping under closed

doors. They lived in the large apartment of a human family, the Pompadays, in New York City.

One morning, Marvin awoke to find the household in an uproar. Usually the first sounds of the day were the gentle rustlings of his parents in the next room and, in the distance, the clank of pots in the Pompaday kitchen sink. But today he heard the frantic clicking of Mrs. Pompaday's high heels, and her voice, anxious and shrill. Just as he was beginning to wonder what had happened, his mother came looking for him in a great hurry.

"Marvin!" she cried. "Come quickly, darling! We have an emergency."

Marvin crawled out of the soft cotton ball that was his bed and, still only half-awake, followed her into the living room. There, his father, his uncle Albert, and his cousin Elaine were deep in conversation. Elaine ran to him and grabbed one of his legs.



"Mrs. Pompaday has lost her contact lens! Down the bathroom sink! And since you're the only one who knows how to swim, we need you to fish it out!"

Marvin drew back in surprise, but his cousin continued happily. "Oh! What if you drown?"

Marvin was not nearly as thrilled at this prospect as Elaine. "I won't drown," he said firmly. "I'm a good swimmer."

He'd practiced swimming for almost a month now, in an old juice bottle cap filled with water. He was the only member of his entire family who could swim, a skill his parents both marveled at and took credit for.

"Marvin has exceptional coordination, such fine control over his legs," Mama often remarked. "It reminds me of my days in the ballet."

"When he sets his mind to something, there's no stopping him," Papa would add smugly. "He's a chip off the old block."

But right now, these words were little comfort to Marvin. Swimming in a bottle cap was one thing—it was half an inch deep. Swimming inside a drainpipe was something else altogether. He paced the room nervously.

Mama was talking to Uncle Albert, looking mad. "Well, I should think not!" she exclaimed. "He's just a child. I say let the Pompadays call a plumber."

Papa shook his head. "It's too risky. If a plumber goes poking around in there, he'll see that the wall is rotting away. He'll say they need to replace it, and that'll be the end of Albert and Edith's home."

Boy Meets Beetle

Marvin lives with his family under the kitchen sink in the Pompadays' apartment. He is very much a beetle. James lives with his family in New York City. He is very much an eleven-year-old boy. After James gets a pen-and-ink set for his birthday, Marvin surprises him by creating an elaborate miniature drawing. Then James ends up with all the credit, and is expected to do it again. Before they know it, the unlikely friends are caught up in an art heist that could lead them to a long-lost drawing by Albrecht Dürer. Of course, James can't go through with the plan without Marvin's help. But can a boy take a beetle to a museum and let him recreate a master work of art without anyone knowing about it? Even more important, can he bring the beetle safely back home?

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★ "With overtones of *Chasing Vermeer* and *The Borrowers*, this inventive mystery . . . packs [a] fast-moving story with perennially seductive themes: hidden lives and secret friendships, miniature worlds lost to disbelievers." —*Publishers Weekly*, Starred Review

★ "A powerful tale of friendship in a novel that is entertaining and full of adventure . . . Murphy's illustrations add perspective and humor, supporting the detailed narrative. A masterpiece of storytelling."

—*School Library Journal*, Starred Review

Go Fish

Look Inside for Interviews with Elise Broach
and Kelly Murphy.

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