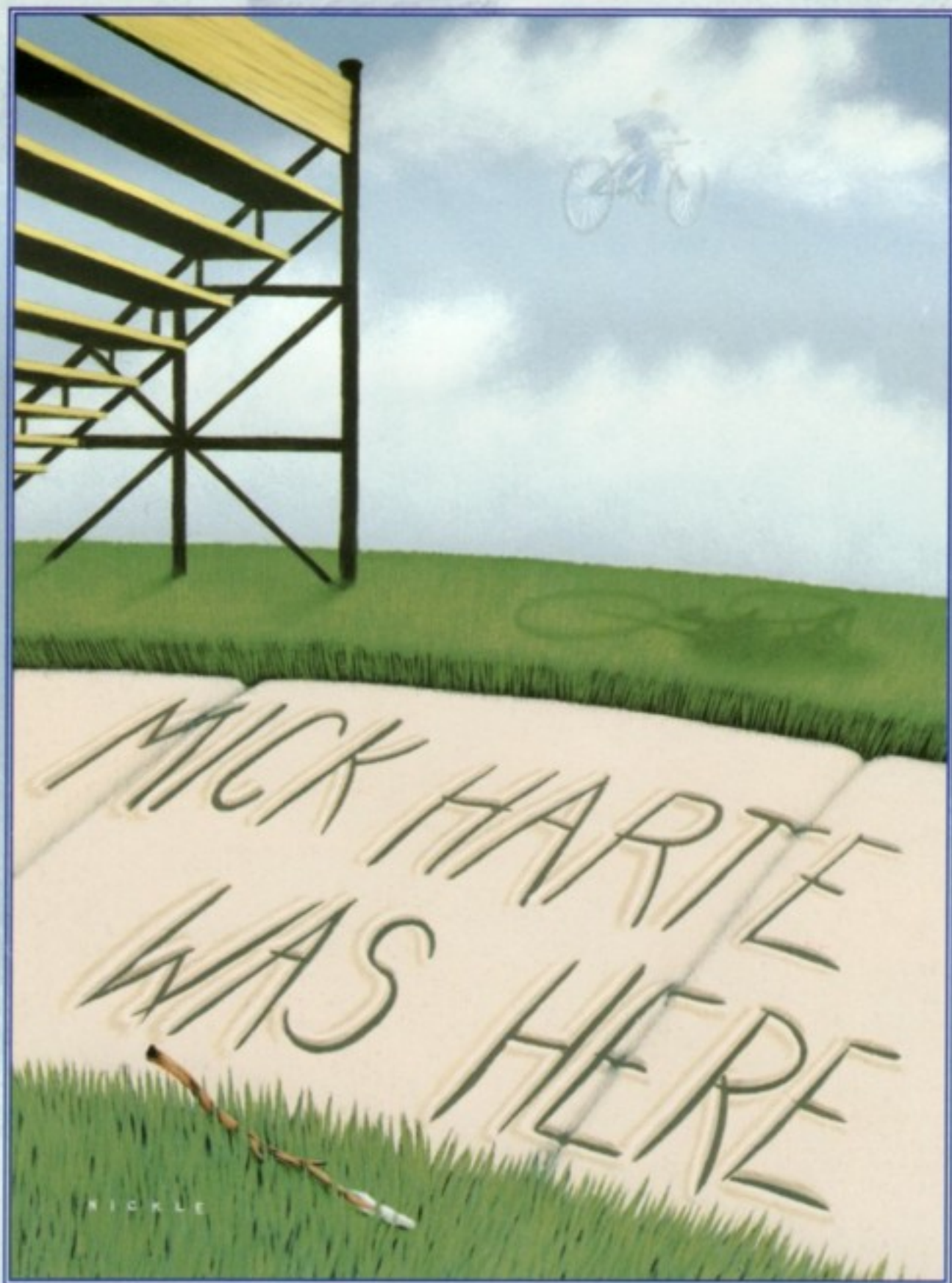


BARBARA PARK



Life will never be the same...

Mick

JUST LET ME SAY right off the bat, it was a bike accident.

It was about as "accidental" as you can get, too.

Like Mick wasn't riding crazy. Or dodging in and out of traffic. And both of his hands were on the handlebars and all like that.

His tire just hit a rock. And he skidded into the back of a passing truck. And that was that. There wasn't a scratch on him. It was a head injury. Period.

So this isn't the kind of book where you meet the main character and you get to like him real

well and then he dies at the end. I hate those kind of books. And besides, I can't think of anything worse than using my brother's accident as the tear-jerking climax to some tragic story.

I don't want to make you cry.

I just want to tell you about Mick.

But I thought you should know right up front that he's not here anymore.

I just thought that would be fair.

I'M ONLY ten months older than he was.

I was "planned."

Mick was a surprise.

He loved it, too. Being a surprise, I mean. He was always teasing my parents about it. Telling them that even before he *existed*, he could outsmart two chemistry majors with birth control pills.

"Just imagine the amazing stunts I'll pull when I'm a sneaky, rebellious *teenager*," he'd say. Then he'd rub his hands together and throw his head way back and do that kind of creepy laugh that mad scientists do in the movies. You know, like "Muuwhaaaahahahaha..." and he'd hunch over and limp out of the room like Igor or somebody.

Mick was excellent at imitating voices, by the way. We have a tape of him yelling "I'm melting! I'm melting!" that sounds just like the Wicked

Witch of the West in *The Wizard of Oz*. Exactly, I mean.

But even without playing the tape, I can still remember how he sounded. I've heard that sometimes when people you love die, you forget their voices. But I haven't forgotten Mick's. Not yet, anyway.

I have a weird kind of memory, I think. Like I've never once been able to remember my parents' anniversary in time to buy them a card. But I can still remember the exact conversation I had with Santa Claus when I was in kindergarten.


He said, "Ho ho ho."

I said, "Your breath smells."

And he said, "Get down."

It wasn't much of a chat, but the point is, it happened eight years ago and I still remember it like it was yesterday. That's why it doesn't surprise me that I can remember everything about the fight Mick and I had four weeks ago. On the morning of the accident.

It started out like most any other school day at our house. My father was running around wearing his usual morning outfit—a shirt and tie, boxer shorts, and black socks. It's pretty humiliating being related to a man in a get-up like that. But Pop never puts on his pants till right before he



Her whole world has been turned upside down...

How could someone like Phoebe's brother die?
Mick Harte was one of the neatest kids you'd ever want to meet—the kid who freaked his mom out by putting a ceramic eye in a defrosted chicken; who went trick-or-treating as Thomas Crapper, the inventor of the modern-day flush toilet; who did a wild solo dance in front of the whole school.

Mick was also the kid who would still be alive now—if he'd only worn his bicycle helmet...

"A full-fledged and fully convincing drama."
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about a terrific 12-year-old boy."**
Kirkus

"A great discussion-starter."
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