

# JERRY SPINELLI

Newbery-award-winning author of *Maniac Magee*



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CARD

 SCHOLASTIC

# 1

Fingers trembling, eyes on the man at the cash register, Mongoose snatched the Milky Way bar and stuck it in his coat pocket.

He waited for lightning to strike. For the hand of God to frizzle him on the spot. The earth to open and swallow him up. Cops at least.

Nothing.

Nothing but himself standing in front of the candy section of the Mini-Mart feeling like a dope. He couldn't believe he was fooling anybody.

"Just look like you're checkin' the stuff out," Weasel had said. "Like you're tryin' to decide what to buy."

Right. So here he was, scratching the back of his head and putting this stupid now-what-do-I-want-to-buy-look on his face. Meanwhile stuffing a candy bar into his pocket.



And nothing happened. The world took no notice.

So he grabbed a handful of Milky Ways and stuffed them. And some Butterfingers. And Almond Joys.

“Bring your coat with the biggest pockets,” Weasel had said. It was good advice.

A handful of Snickers. Baby Ruths.

Two aisles over, he could see Weasel’s red ski cap bobbing behind the pastries.

M&M’s. Tootsie Rolls.

Now the red cap was moving down the aisle, past the sodas and pretzels toward the door.

Time to go.

They met at the cash register. They walked past the man, cool, casual, not looking — (“*Don’t* look at him.” Weasel had been firm about that) — though Mongoose mightily wanted to.

Outside, the November air splashed cold on their faces, and Mongoose knew he had been sweating. They walked to the end of the block. The moment they turned the corner, as if on signal, they ran, raced up the street, tension bursting into howls of laughter.

They did not stop until they reached Mongoose’s apartment house. They went up six flights of stairs and then one more to their favorite place — the roof.

They strutted, they swaggered, they posed. They went to the edge and looked over the town and threw their fists in the air.

"It's ours!" Weasel crowed. "All ours!"

Except for the clock tower of the bank on Main Street, the roof of Mongoose's place was the highest spot in town.

Mongoose, his arm still thrust to the night sky, turned to Weasel and said, "What do you mean, it's ours?"

"Just what I said. If we can walk in there and walk out with half the stuff, we can do anything. Nothin' can stop us." Weasel shouted over the rooftops. "We ain't little no more!"

Mongoose grinned. "Yeah."

Weasel was right. That was the whole point of this night, the new names, everything: *They were not little anymore*. They had both had birthdays — their twelfth — in October, and both had begun to notice the same thing happening. People were smaller, or seemed so anyway. Their teacher, their parents, older kids, grown-ups — suddenly they were not the danger they used to be. And neither were their weapons: detentions, groundings, scoldings, rules, threats.

Nothing and no one was as big or as fearsome as before. They had both felt this, but they had felt it separately, for neither had words to express it.



Mongoose, Brenda, Sonseray, and April have nothing in common . . .

until a mysterious blue card appears as if by magic and begins to change each of their lives. None of them guesses it at first, but that strange blue card will be their ticket to the past—and to a future they never imagined.

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**—The Horn Book Magazine**

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