

**A**  
**Long Way**  
**from**  
**Welcome**

*A Mystery  
in Paris*

**Echo Lewis**

**eVersion**

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*from*  
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A Mystery in Paris



**Echo Lewis**

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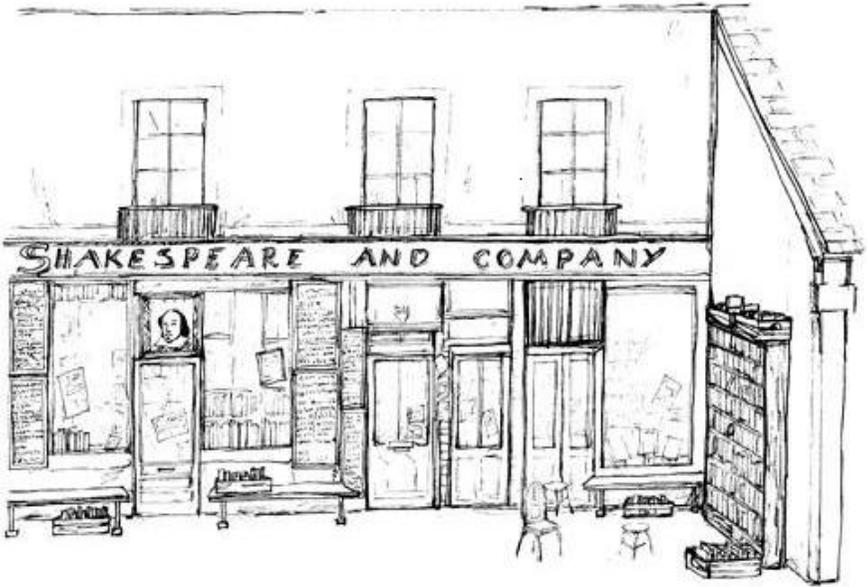
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# Dedication

*For  
Andrew and Alec McQuillen  
Bonnie Staib, Jim Guinan  
And  
Pat Broderick*



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# 1. "My Kingdom for a Horse!"

ALERT AND PURPOSEFUL, Maggie McGilligan approached her bike as a warrior would a respected opponent. Keeping her eyes on the overloaded front basket, she took a deep breath, gripped the chest-high handlebars of the rusted, crusted relic, and strained to drag the beast away from the school stand.

"‘A horse,’" she groaned, pulling at the blue metal monster, "‘my kingdom for a horse!’"

"Will you cool it with the Shakespeare, dummy? Keep it up, and I'll never tell you what I found out in Dad's office last night." Tanya Becker, as tall and trim as Maggie was short and tending toward chunky, jumped onto her new-millennium mountain bike and sped across the smooth black asphalt of the Henry Rumbleton Middle School parking lot. Her raven hair flowed out like a river behind her.

"See if I care what you found out!" Maggie yelled into the growing distance between them. "And, hey, thanks for the help!" She yanked fiercely at her bike, and the sleeping Mammoth jerked backward, awake at last. Gripping the handlebars, Maggie jogged along beside it to get it going and hopped on. She slid from side to side on the frayed leather seat, pumping hard to gain momentum.

At the far end of the parking lot, Tanya stopped to gather her long hair into a ponytail, and Maggie, glad for her out-of-the-way braid down the back, caught up—and kept going.

"To Finch's and freedom!" she shouted. "Last one there's a duck!"

"Eat dirt!" Tanya leaped back onto her shiny-red wonder-bike, and Maggie was doomed. As hard as she pedaled, she couldn't match Mighty Mammoth to Red Flash. Tanya caught up easily and reached the end of the block half-a-wheel ahead.

Maggie pedaled faster, but stopped caring who had the lead. She let the hot breeze of this Wednesday in June draw her into summer sun and freedom, and toward the railroad tracks that cut across town two blocks ahead. She could hear the seventy-car, two-engine freight to Chicago gathering momentum as it pulled out of the station yard. The engineer Maggie had known all her life would have taken over at the helm.

“Clackety-slap, clackety-slap! Chug, chug, chah, chug!” Maggie’s feet left the pedals as she tap-danced the train rhythm in the air. The high school kids claimed that Savion Glover was the best tap dancer in the twenty-first century, but that was only because Maggie hadn’t started her lessons yet.

“Clackety-clack, yeah, keep track! Clackety-clack; don’t send me back! School’s out, and so am I—call me a bird that’s flyin’ high!” Improvising at the top of her lungs, Maggie dropped her feet back to the pedals and churned toward the track, where the big-nosed locomotive pulled into sight from behind the defunct water tower. Maggie waved to the engineer. “Yo, Mac, go Mac, that’s my man!”

The train whistle blasted hello, and Mac’s arm appeared in greeting through the engine’s open side window before the front end of the train swung north and out of sight behind the lumberyard.

Maggie pulled to a stop beside Tanya at the train track, where they had to wait for the rest of the train to pass. The wait gave Maggie time to jump off her bike and tap the train rhythm on the pavement. Using Mighty Mammoth’s handlebars as ballast she did a few high kicking leaps between taps. “Yes, train, go train, sing me free. I love my town, and it loves me!”

“You are utterly crazy.” Tanya had to keep one hand on her bike, but she held her other one over her ear. “I’m going to tell your mother to think it over about letting you take tap dancing lessons,” she muttered, and as soon as the end of the train reached the intersection, she rolled Red Flash under the rail and escaped around the caboose to the other side of the tracks.

Maggie laughed, ducked under the rising guardrail, got Mighty Mammoth going, and hopped on. Bumping across the tracks, she thanked her lucky stars it was the train heading to Chicago and not her. She shuddered at the thought of the smog, the noise, the lonesome, hollow feeling of being surrounded by strangers. If Maggie ever had to tap dance a city, she didn’t know what she would do. Jackhammer and car-horn rhythms meant nothing to her. In order to dance, she needed the rhythmic throb of harvest machinery at Smith’s farm, the chattering and scolding of squirrels in Warden’s woods, the little kids splashing and yelling at Moody’s pond. Shaking the grim picture of city life out of her head, Maggie pedaled hard down the street.

Two blocks past the train tracks, she urged Mighty Mammoth up the curb and onto the sidewalk, where she skidded to a stop between Tanya and the Finch's Bakery storefront. She kicked her stand down and flung the bakery door open before her friend, the unanimously elected princess of the eighth grade, had quit fiddling with her wind-blown ponytail.

"Hi, Mr. Q!"

Jacob Quinnell, present owner and operator of Finch's, stared at Maggie through the upper part of his bifocals. "Where's the fire?" His raspy voice sawed the air. "The way you two landed, I thought we'd lose the window this time for sure."

"Aw, we weren't even close." Flushed and breathless, Maggie grinned up at him.

Tanya appeared beside her at the counter. "I'll take one lemon-filled donut," she said, all business, "along with a cream puff and a diet cola."

Mr. Q's stick-thin hand halted in its reach for a white paper bag on the shelf behind him. "You've got to be kidding. About the diet cola, that is."

"No, I'm very serious." Tanya pulled her freshly brushed ponytail over her shoulder and twisted the end around her fingers. "We're celebrating the last day of eighth grade, but I don't want to get fat."

"Well then, how about a sugar-free yogurt instead of the cream puff?"

"Ooooh, no, I love cream puffs."

Maggie laughed at Tanya's moon-eyed expression, but Mr. Q hung onto his wrinkled frown. He gathered Tanya's order, handed it over, and turned to Maggie.

"I want a double chocolate donut, a maple dip one, and a diet ginger ale—please."

Behind his glasses, Mr. Q rolled his eyes, but he gave Maggie her order, and she and Tanya ran outside. Tanya plunked her donut bag into Maggie's already-bulging wire bike basket.

"Quick," Tanya said, grabbing her own handlebars, "let's sneak into the Roxy and eat our grub."

"Tanya, no!" A knot pulled tight in Maggie's stomach. "Your dad's boutique—look at it! There are two measly lanes of hardly any traffic separating us from *Fashions'* show window. And your

dad's not away in Paris buying new clothes to sell. He's right here in Welcome, Indiana—probably with a pair of binoculars trained on *you!*”

Tanya wrinkled her sculptured nose. “’Course he’s here in town. Where would the challenge be if he wasn’t?” She paused, her head slightly tilted. “I doubt if he’s taken to using binoculars yet,” she said thoughtfully, then burst into laughter. “I pulled off sneaking into his office above the store last night, didn’t I?”

“Barely! You were lucky he dropped the key outside the door—and what if he’d wanted something from the closet while you were hiding in there?”

“He didn’t,” Tanya reminded her. “I wish I’d had a few more minutes alone in the filing cabinet, though.”

“Why? What did you find? It’s something about Bartholomew, isn’t it? Tell me!” To heck with pride—Maggie wanted to *know*.

“Wait ’til we get into the Roxy. Come on.”

Maggie held back. “How about a picnic out in the woods by the creek instead? In the great outdoors. Why should we have to sneak into an abandoned movie theater to eat a couple measly donuts, when your dad makes enough money at *Fashions* to buy you your own theater, if you wanted it?”

“That’s just it!” Tanya pounded a delicate fist against her bike seat. “My dad could buy me whatever I want—*ten* bikes like this, for instance—and leave me alone. That’s how it’s supposed to work when you’re a rich kid, right? Not this time! Dad has to change the pattern. He wants to know where I am every second. *And* who I’m with.” Tanya’s hand went to her slim hip, and she leaned forward over her bike seat. “So far, we’ve managed to keep up the false impression he’s under that you’re an upright and respectable companion. So let’s hang onto the image, but not have any chickening out here, okay?”

Maggie quailed under the glare of two blazing onyx eyes until, with a twist of her shoulders, Tanya turned away to steer her bike around the bakery.

“Yeesh!” Hating herself for doing it, but not wanting to refuse her friend, Maggie guided Mighty Mammoth between the bakery and the old closed-down Roxy to the alley. Peering back over her shoulder while Tanya pulled a loaded key ring from her belt bag, Maggie thought ruefully of how Tanya’s dad really did believe

Maggie was a good influence for Tanya. As if Maggie could influence Tanya to do anything. Well, she *had* gotten Tanya into roller blading instead of playing video games every day after school. That was a good influence, wasn't it? Still, at times like this . . .

"Hurry!" Maggie whispered, as Tanya fumbled for an old-fashioned skeleton key and stuck it into the bottom of the rusted padlock that secured the theater's rickety back door.

"Relax," Tanya drawled, but she hastily clicked the lock open and dumped the key ring back in her bag. In one swift motion, she pulled the door ajar, pushed her bike inside, and leaned it against the wall.

Maggie nearly ran the front tire of Mighty Mammoth up the back of Tanya's legs in her haste to get inside the theater. She shoved the door closed with her foot and leaned her bike against Tanya's.

"Okay!" she panted. "We made it. So, what did you find out about Bartholomew?"