

# IT'S ME, HENRY!

STÉPHANIE DESLAURIERS  
ILLUSTRATED BY GENEVIÈVE DESPRÉS





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TRANSLATED BY CHARLES SIMARD

ORCA BOOK PUBLISHERS

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**Summary:** This picture book about a young boy on the autism spectrum highlights the way he functions differently than his classmates. His way of being in the world has both its challenges and its strengths.

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*To my muses, Mattias, Ana and Rodrigo.  
I love you so.  
—S.D.*

*To Matisse and Lalou.  
—G.D.*



I have a friend at school. But she says we aren't friends, because she doesn't like it when I call her *Leucanthemum vulgare*.

I only call her that because I like to call things by their real names. And in the plant world, *Leucanthemum vulgare* means *daisy*.

Daisy says she is not a plant—she is a person.

# Leucanthemum Vulgare



When my teacher asks our class a question, I always know the answer right away. So I say it right away.

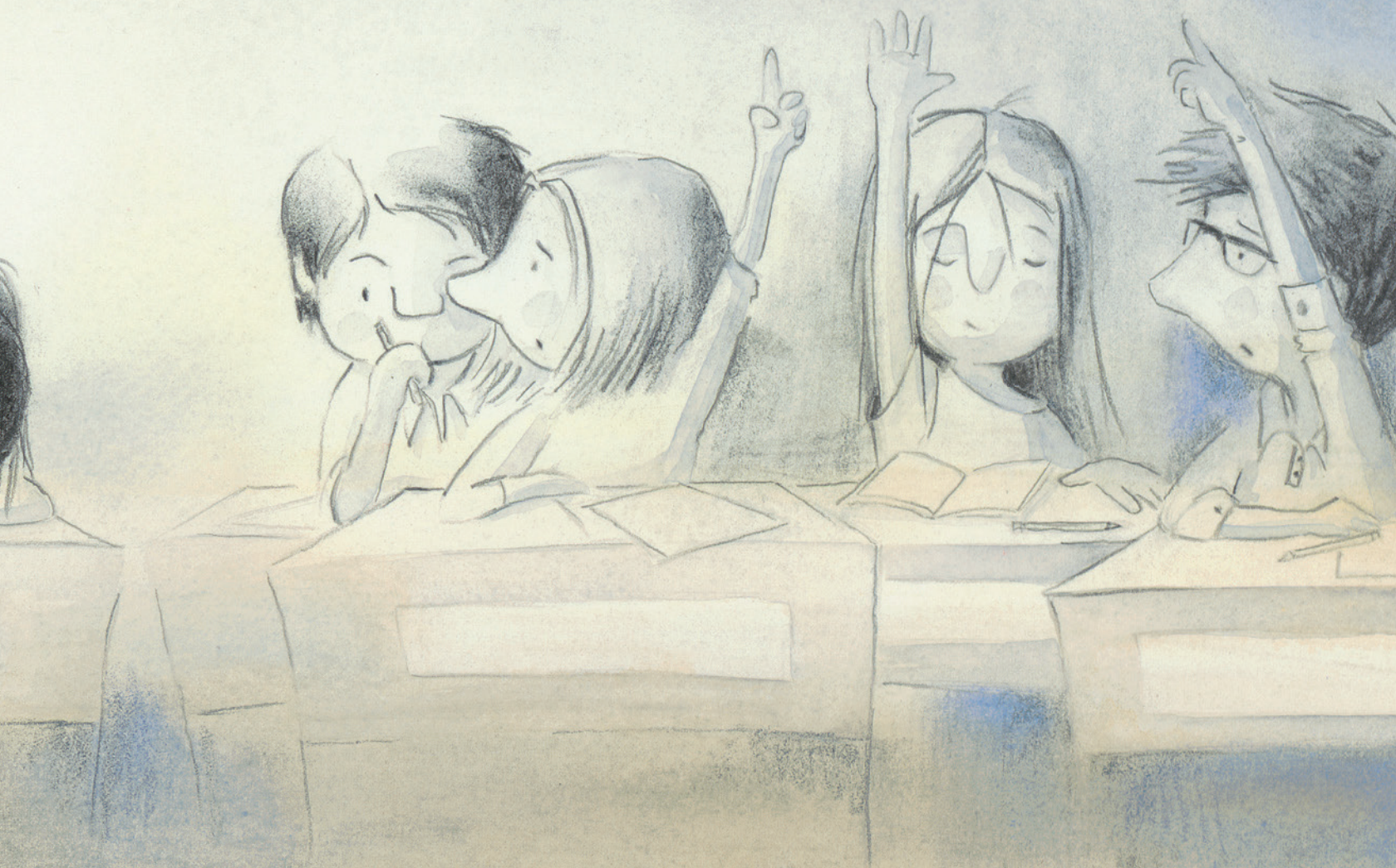
“ $9 \times 3 = 27!$ ” I yell.

“You’re correct, Henry. But you didn’t raise your hand and you interrupted—”

“Yes! I’m the best!”



Wait. Are some of my classmates making faces? I wonder if they're impressed by how smart I am.





*Rrrring!*

Recess! I run out into the hall. I need to get to my favorite place in the schoolyard, which is under the *Salix babylonica*.

The *Salix babylonica* is a majestic weeping willow that hides me under its branches. I feel safe there. I can watch the other kids play hopscotch or jump rope. I'm far away from the noisy playground, and it feels better on my ears.

I sit down and put my hands onto the cold ground.

Some older fifth-graders come close to me and talk like I'm not there.

"He's under the tree alone again? Weird..."

Then they leave.

My throat feels like it has a big lump in it. It doesn't go away, even when I take deep breaths.

Nobody understands me. No one! I'm tired of being a kid. I want to wake up and be a grown-up. Then I can decide everything and control everything.

Tears roll down my cheeks. I'm too hot, and my hands are getting sweaty even though the ground is cold. I just want to be alone.

The bell rings, and all the other kids go back to class. The yard is empty and quiet. The quiet feels good, and I start to relax.





I hear soft footsteps coming close to my hiding place. It's our school counselor. I like her—she's the only one here who understands me.

“Okay,” I say. I'll go back inside the school with her, but not back to my class.

We stop at her office. Her walls are covered with students' drawings. Some of them are mine. I feel safe here with her. When I feel calm enough, she walks me back to my class.

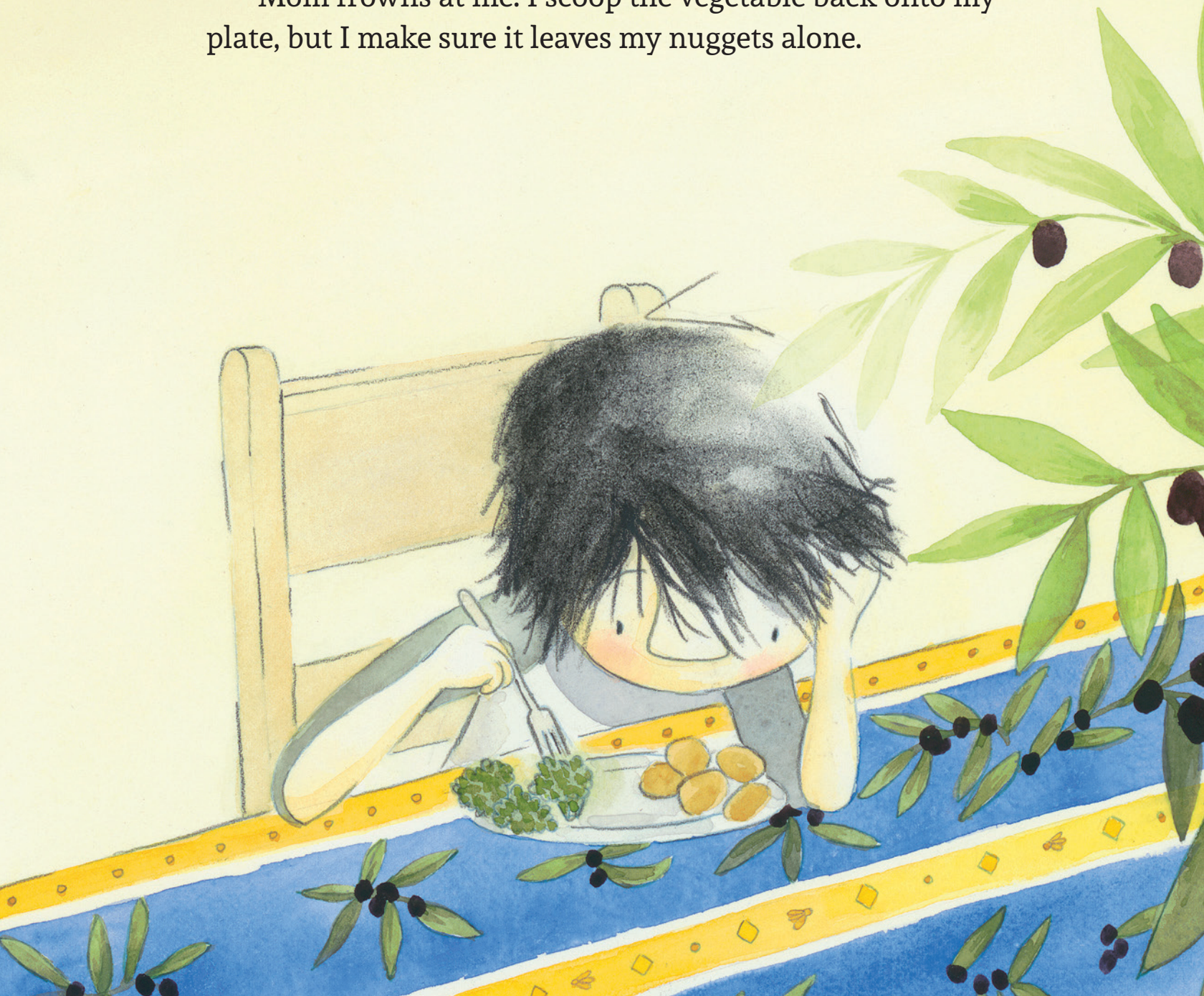


Like every Thursday, Dad picks me up after school.

As soon as I walk into the house, I smell my favorite dinner—nuggets!

Oh yuck! With broccoli. No! It's touching my nuggets! I push it off my plate with a quick flick of my fork.

Mom frowns at me. I scoop the vegetable back onto my plate, but I make sure it leaves my nuggets alone.

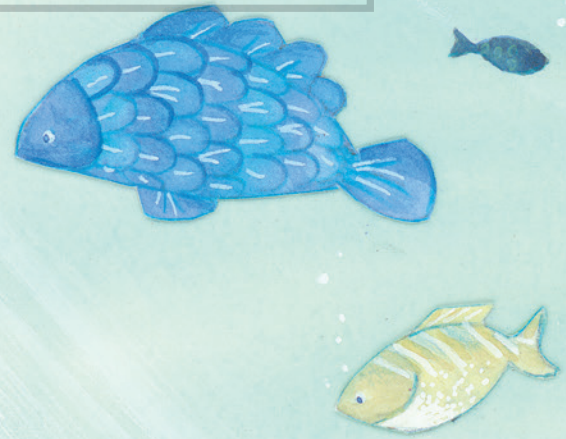






All through dinner I talk about tomorrow's year-end field trip. I've been waiting for this day for so long. The Botanical Garden is my favorite place on the whole entire planet. I even have my own annual pass. I know almost all the employees, like Ms. Rose and Mr. Haywood. I hope they'll be there tomorrow!





“Okay, Henry, come on. It’s bath time.”

“Again? I just took one 1,440 minutes ago.”

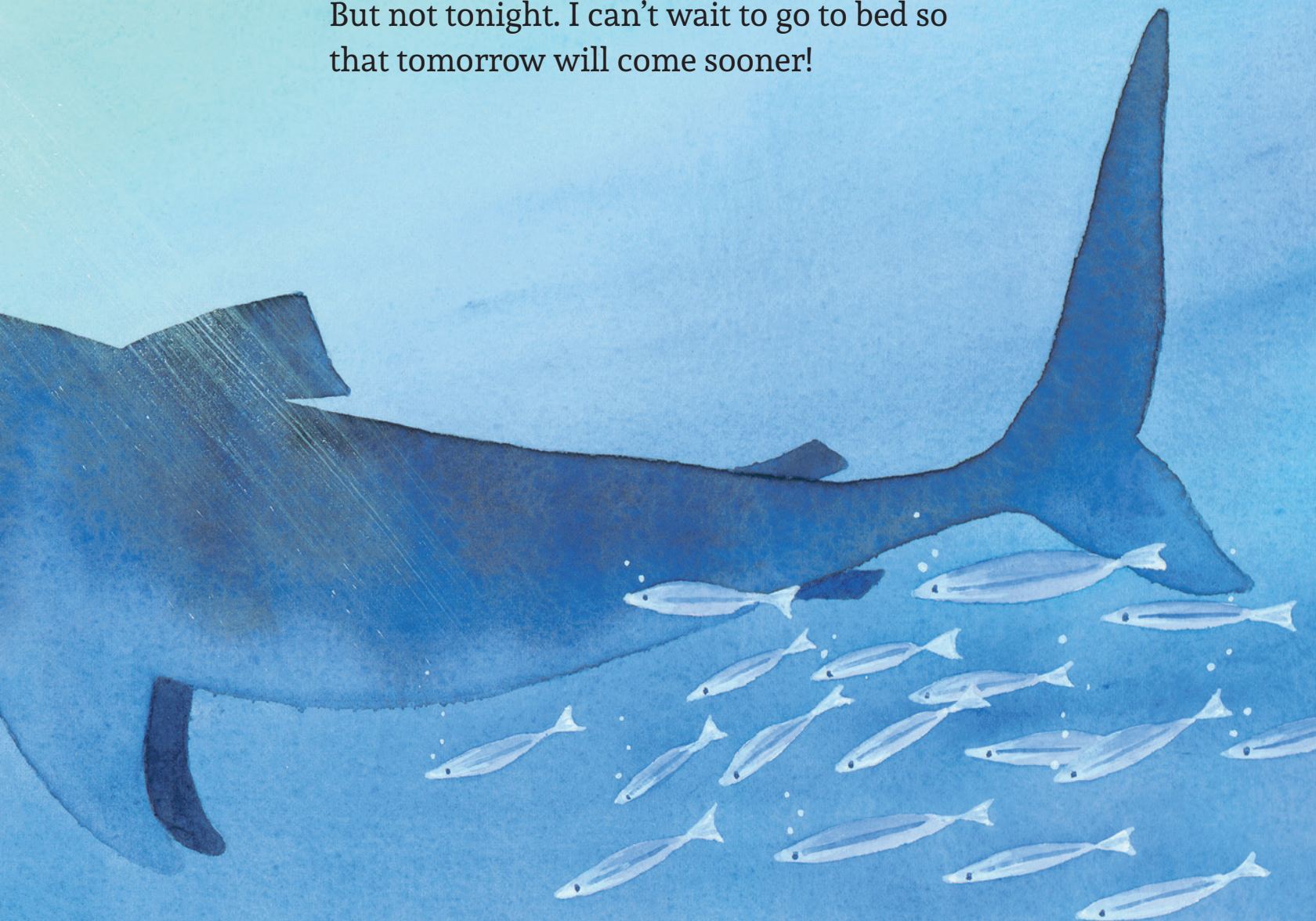
“Yep, we take one every night.”

After a number of detours to the living room, my room and my parents’ room, I dive into the hot water. Wearing my diving mask, I am transformed into a marine explorer. I’m just about to discover a new coral when suddenly...



“Swim for your liiiives! A shaaaark!”

Sometimes I ignore Mom’s knocks at the bathroom door telling me it’s time to get out. But not tonight. I can’t wait to go to bed so that tomorrow will come sooner!



In the morning I hop around as I get ready for the big day! I check that I have my notepad to take notes and make sketches, my magnifying glass so I can observe the details of the plants, my water bottle to stay hydrated, and my explorer's hat so I don't get a sunburn.



When we get to my favorite place on the planet,  
Ms. Rose is there!

“Hello, Henry! Will you help me introduce  
the plants to your friends today?”

“Yes!”





The tour begins. Sometimes Ms. Rose looks at me and I add some extra information, and in some places I even provide the whole explanation. I'm definitely in my element here.

“These are sunflowers of the *Helianthus* genus. I would rather stay in the shade, but they like a lot of light. Did you know that sunflowers are mainly grown for their seeds, which are used to make oil?”



“My parents use sunflower oil to cook!” shouts Daisy.

“Me too!”

“In some countries sunflowers are considered weeds. Like the *Taraxacum officinale* here—I mean, the dandelions.”



“On your left you will see a few *Leucanthemum vulgare*, which are also called—”


“Daisies,” says Daisy.

She turns to me, and her face lights up with a smile. Mine does the same, and I feel my cheeks get hot. I need some water—quick!









“Okay, it’s time to find a partner!” says Ms. Rose.


Oh. I always end up alone when we have to do this,  
like in gym class.

I feel a hand on my shoulder. It’s *Leucanthem*...um, Daisy.

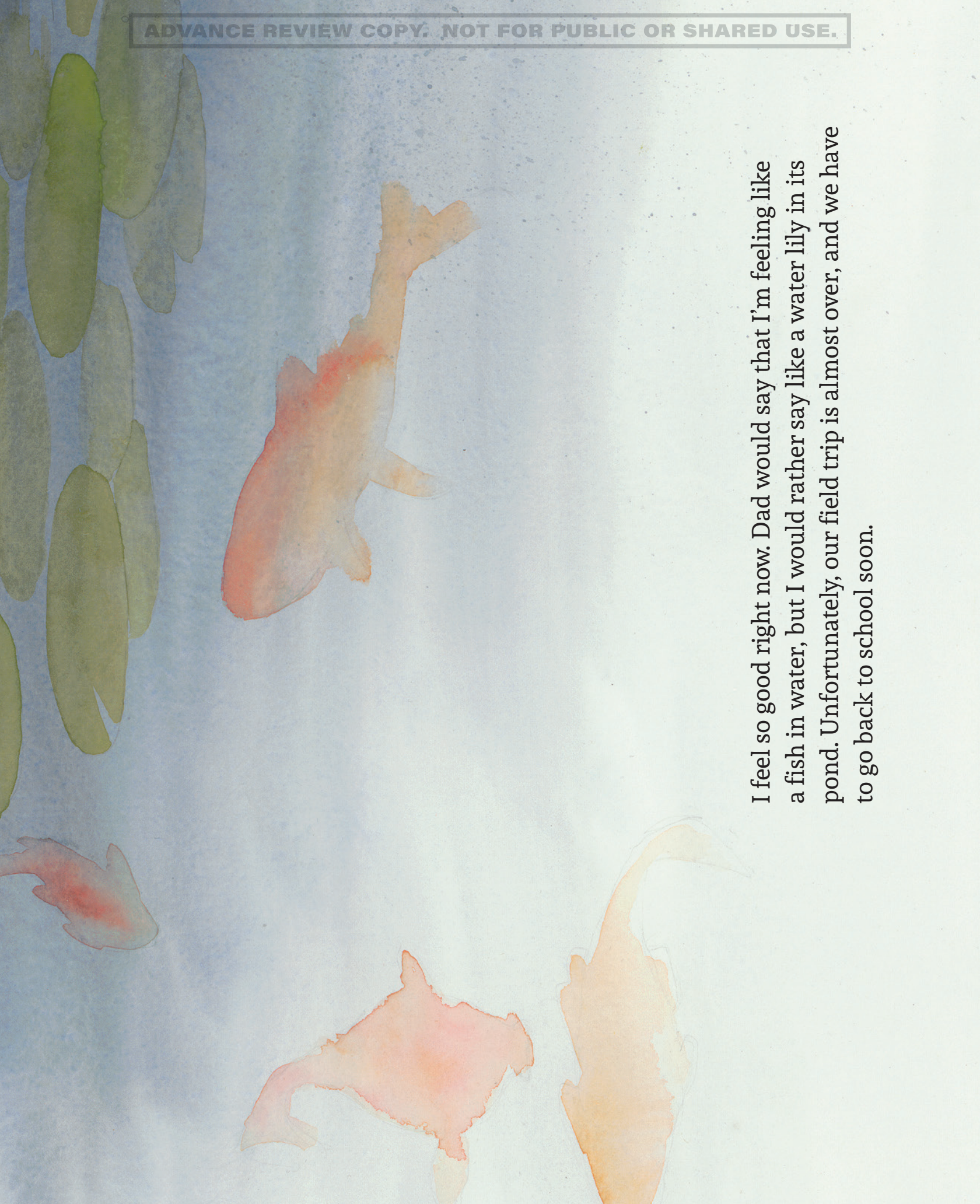
“Can we be partners?”

“Yes!”

I’m so happy that my cheeks become red like a rose. I even  
let Daisy use my special magnifying glass when she asks.

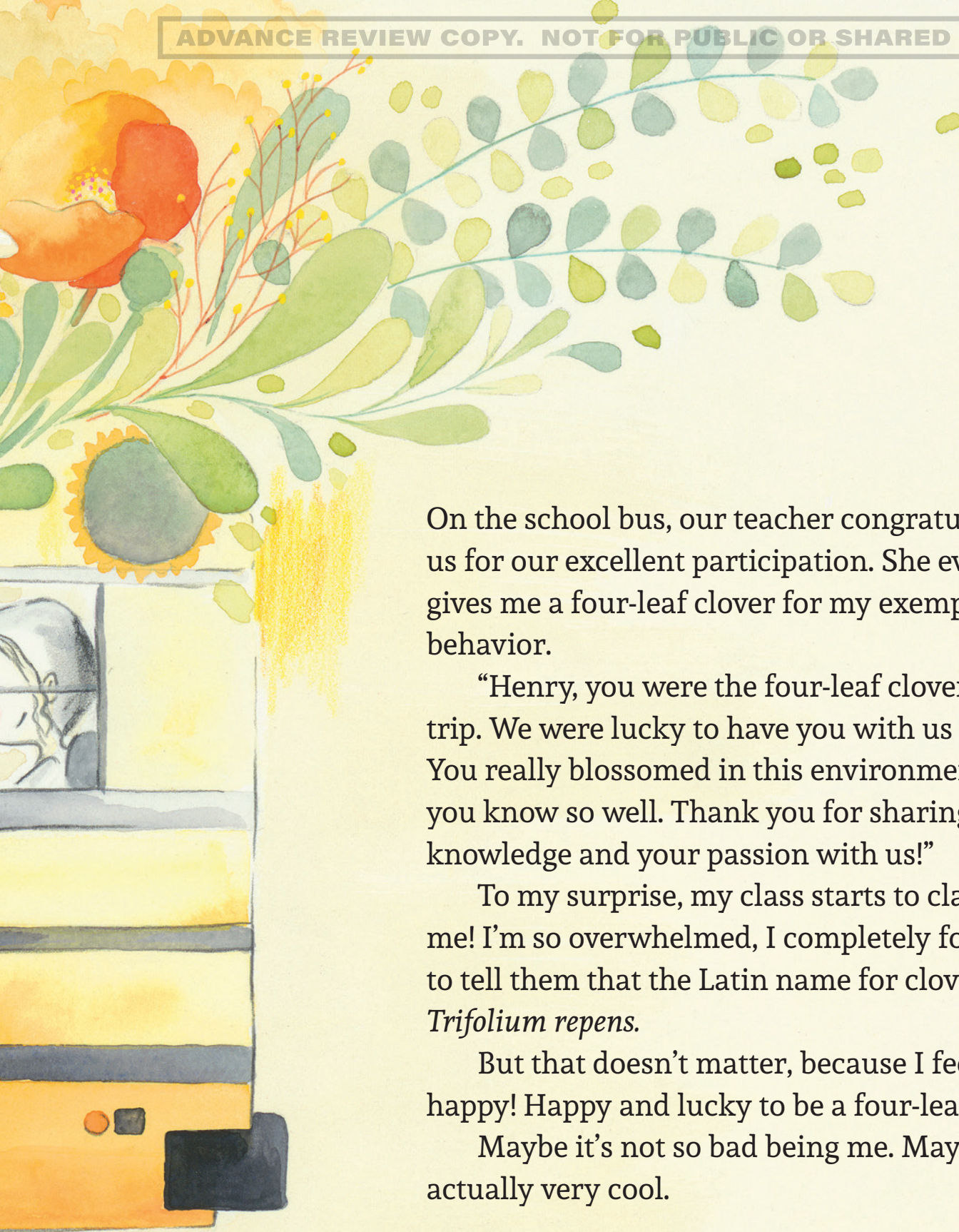






I feel so good right now. Dad would say that I'm feeling like a fish in water, but I would rather say like a water lily in its pond. Unfortunately, our field trip is almost over, and we have to go back to school soon.





On the school bus, our teacher congratulates us for our excellent participation. She even gives me a four-leaf clover for my exemplary behavior.

“Henry, you were the four-leaf clover of this trip. We were lucky to have you with us today. You really blossomed in this environment that you know so well. Thank you for sharing your knowledge and your passion with us!”

To my surprise, my class starts to clap for me! I’m so overwhelmed, I completely forget to tell them that the Latin name for clover is *Trifolium repens*.

But that doesn’t matter, because I feel very happy! Happy and lucky to be a four-leaf clover.

Maybe it’s not so bad being me. Maybe...it’s actually very cool.



**STÉPHANIE DESLAURIERS** is an author and psycho-educator. Since 2012 she has published fifteen books and written extensively for *Format familial* on Télé-Québec. Stéphanie is the stepmother to a teenage son who is on the spectrum, and she speaks extensively about autism spectrum disorder. The French edition of this title, *Laurent, c'est moi!*, was nominated for the Governor General's Literary Award, the Elizabeth Mrazik-Cleaver Award and the Harry Black Youth Award. Stéphanie lives in Quebec.



**GENEVIÈVE DESPRÉS** completed a degree in industrial design at the Université de Montréal but decided instead to pursue her passion for drawing. After spending a few years in Europe exploring different techniques, Geneviève returned to Quebec. Since then, she has illustrated over thirty picture books, many of which have been translated into other languages. Geneviève uses a variety of techniques in her art and plays with texture and the transparency of different mediums to create unique images. She lives in Saint-Lambert on the south shore of Montreal with her family.



# WE ALL GROW DIFFERENTLY.

Henry marches to the beat of his own green thumb. He doesn't remember to raise his hand in class and he prefers to call plants by their proper Latin names, much to the frustration of his classmates. Most days, Henry doesn't notice how different he is from the other kids in his grade. Some days, he does.

But when his class goes on a field trip to his favorite place in the world, the local botanical gardens, Henry's knowledge of the many plants shows the other kids that his unique interests are really something special.



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