



Bitsy

A Spider's Tale



By J.M. Simpson

Illustrated by Sandra Rodriguez

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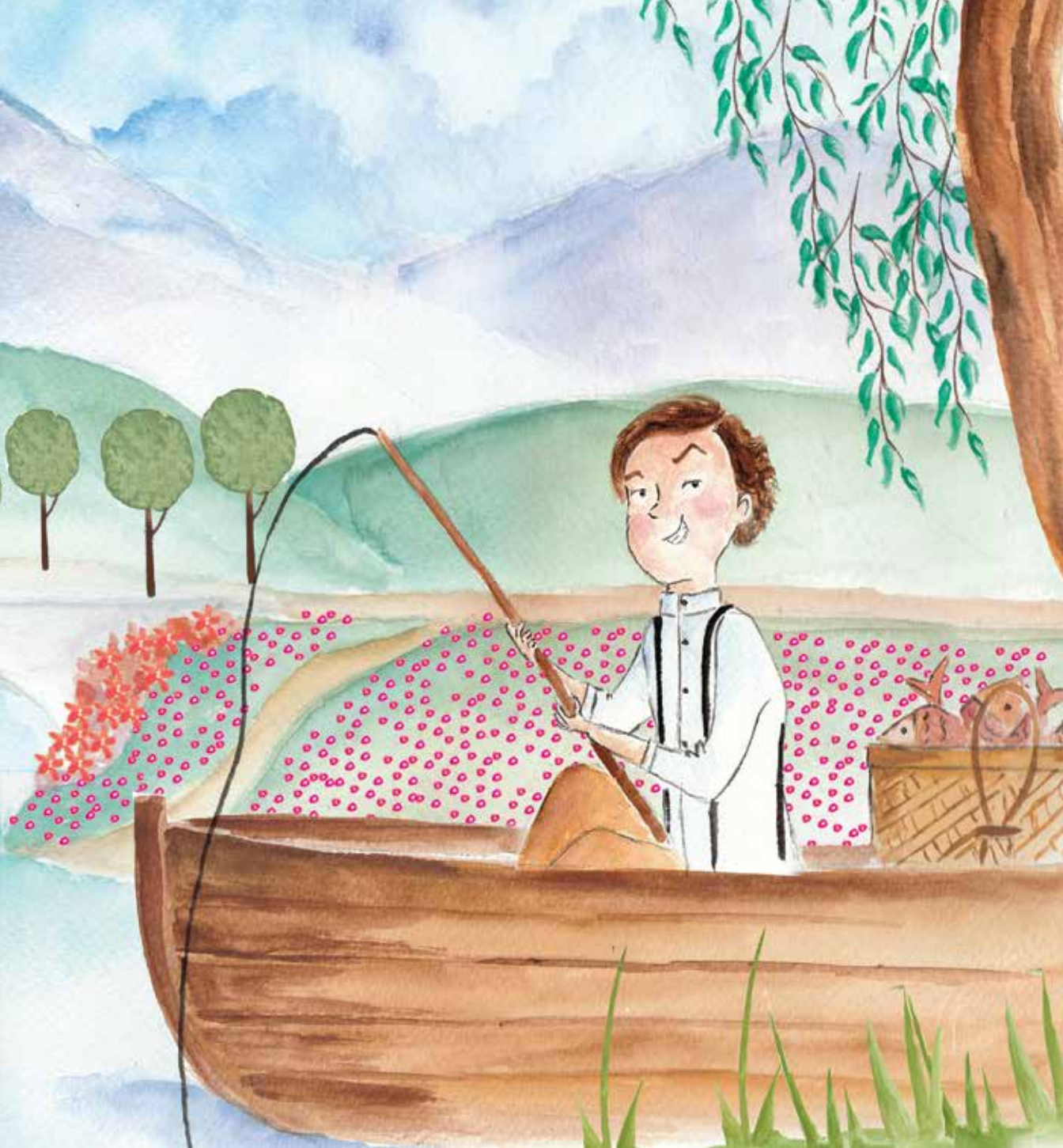
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First Edition
Printed by Friesens Corporation in Altona, MB, Canada.
February 2017, Job #230330

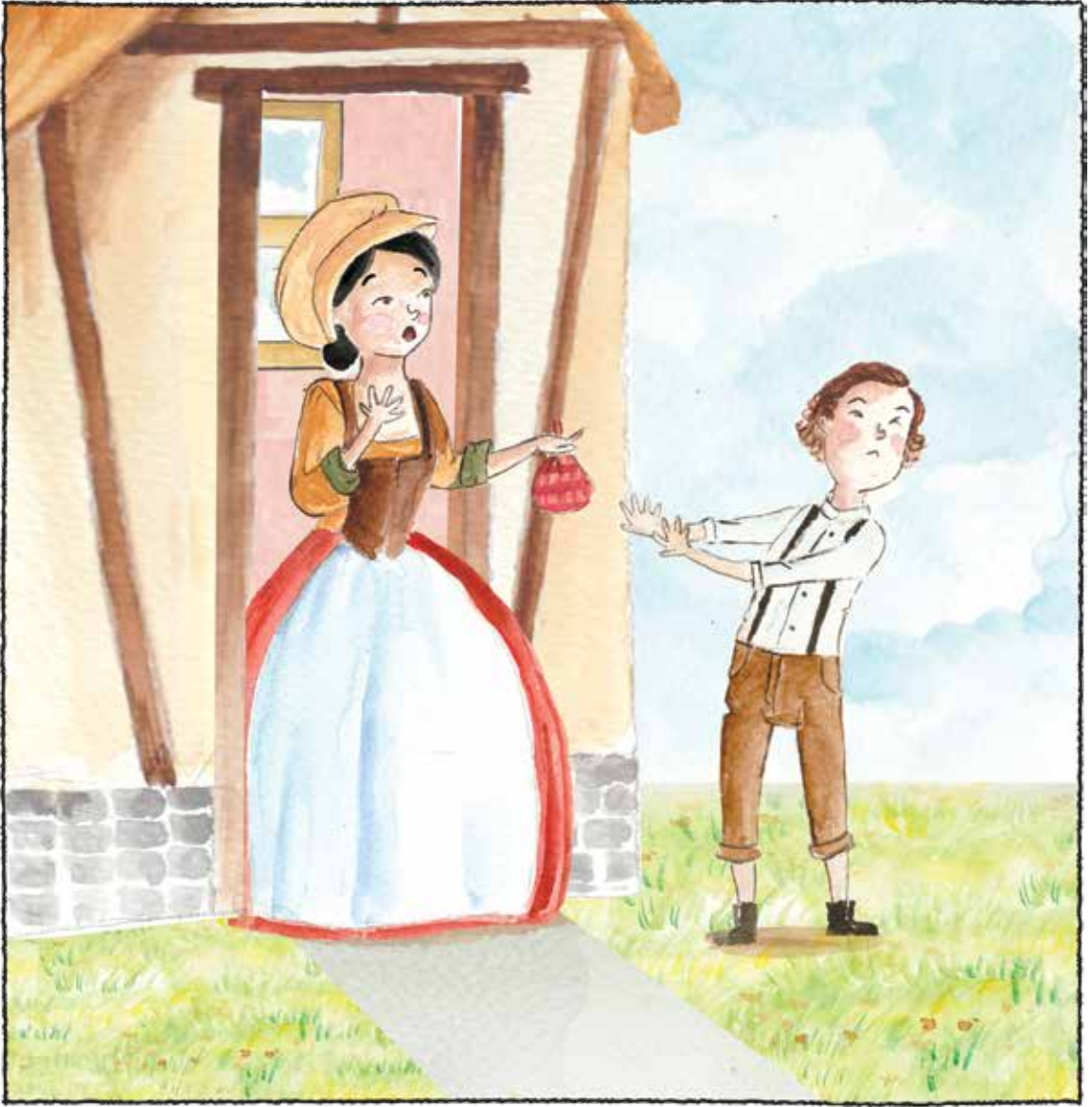




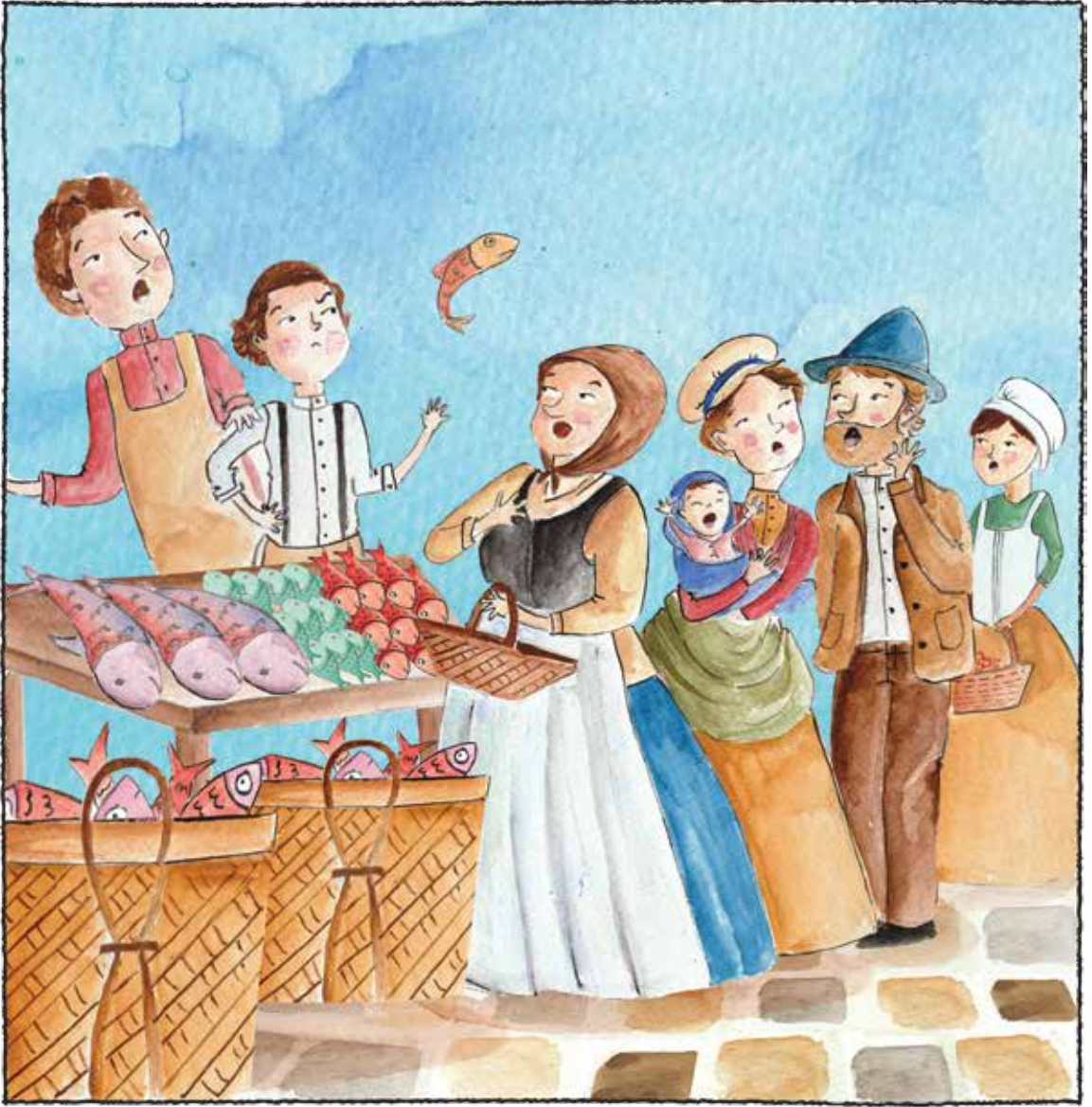
In a long ago kingdom, there lived a boy named Bitsy. His real name was Edward. But his grandfather Ned and his father Ed said he was no bigger than an itsy, bitsy minnow when he was born. And the nickname stuck, as names often do.



Bitsy, like his father, was a fisherman for the royal palace. Every day he caught shimmering rainbow trout and golden perch for the table of the king, queen, and the beautiful princess Annette. But unlike his father, Bitsy was selfish and rude.



He was a terror to his family. He complained about doing his chores. He had the table manners of an ogre. And when his mother packed his daily lunch, he said, “Yuck! I hate bread and cheese!”

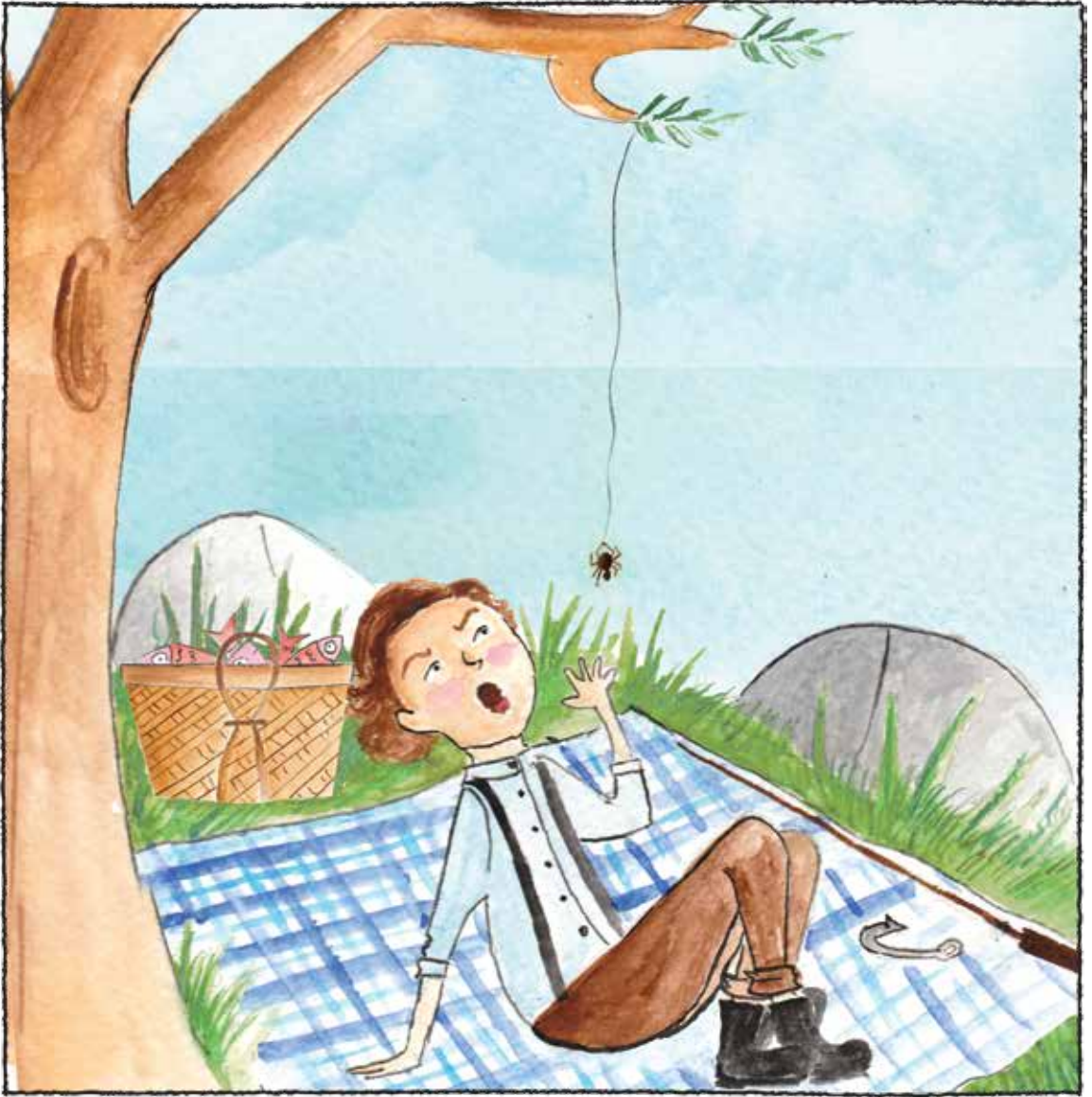


At the fish market, Bitsy's father served each customer with kingly courtesy. But Bitsy was rude to everyone. He never said "please" or "thank you". He just tossed the fish into each customer's arms and yelled, "Next! Hurry it along!"



He was especially rude to the royal kitchen maid Meg. He always made her wait at the end of the line.

“Stand back!” he would say. “You’ll have your turn when I’m good and ready.” But Meg did not get angry. She waited patiently and sweetly for her turn, and she always wished Bitsy a good day.



Bitsy did not think his days were good. One summer day, Bitsy was grumbling about the heat as he fished. Suddenly, a big brown spider dropped down by his side. Bitsy frowned.

“Yuck!” he exclaimed. “Go away!” Instead, the spider crawled closer.

“You ugly old thing!” said Bitsy. He raised his boot to stomp on the spider.



But before he could bring his foot down, the spider transformed into a sparkling water sprite.

“Hardhearted boy!” she said. “Why would you crush a harmless little creature?”

“It was just an ugly old spider,” scoffed Bitsy. “Now move. You’re dripping on my blanket.”

The water sprite frowned. “Your manners leave much to be desired,” she said. “I think a consequence is in order.”



She waved her hands three times and said,
“Until you learn to think of others,
A spider you will be.
A hard task lies before you,
In order to be free.
When someone finds you beautiful,
And that’s truly what they see,
Then all your legs will disappear,
A boy again you’ll be.”



Poof! Before Bitsy could utter a protest, he turned into a small brown spider on his own picnic blanket. The water sprite vanished.

“That’s not fair!” he yelled. “Change me back!” He shook his front legs in anger. He stamped all eight feet.

Finally, he stopped to think. “Well,” he declared. “I won’t be a spider for long. I just need to make someone say I’m beautiful.”

He climbed into a tree to look for someone to help him.

“Aha! The royal party is coming for a picnic!” he crowed. “I’ll get the lovely Princess Annette to say I’m beautiful, and the spell will be broken. Easy as catching a trout.”

By great good fortune, the royal party sat down right under Bitsy’s tree and began to lunch.





Bitsy slid down a strand of spider silk next to the princess. “Yoo-hoo, your Royal Highness,” he called. “Up here! It’s your royal fisherman. Say three words and I’ll join you for lunch. It’s simple. Just say, ‘You are beautiful.’”

The princess looked up. “Eww!” she shrieked. “An ugly brown spider is talking to me! Catch it! Squash it! Smash it!”



Bitsy did not want to be squashed or smashed. He scrambled back up his silken web until he was out of reach.

The horrified princess ordered everyone to return to the palace. Bitsy saw his chance of help disappearing as quickly as the sun behind clouds. Thinking quickly, he scuttled into the royal picnic basket and was carried back to the palace.

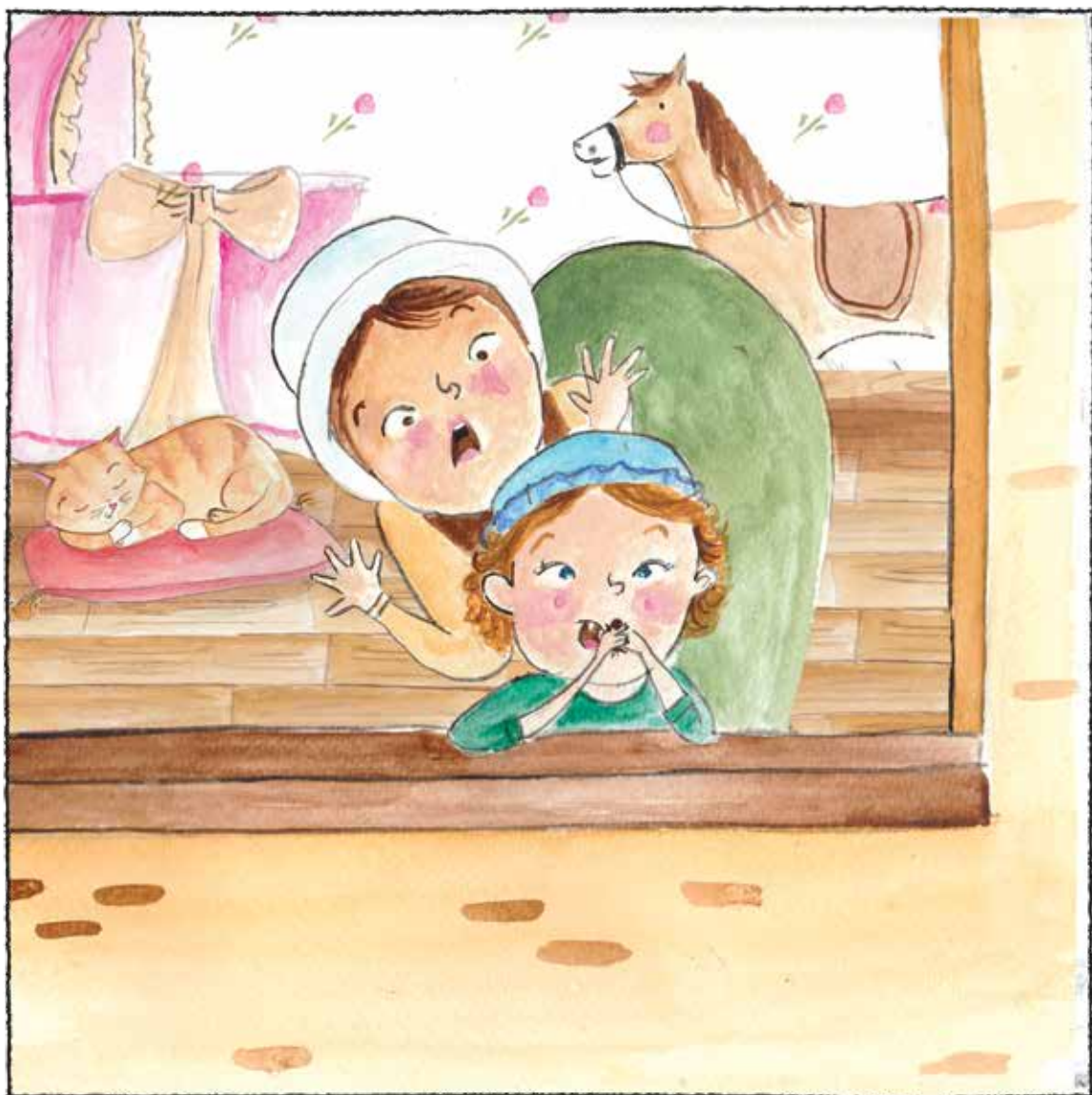


When the maids shook the crumbs out of the basket, they tossed poor Bitsy out as well. He sailed over the parapet and landed on a wall, just as fat drops of rain began to fall.

He shivered. He sneezed. The only dry place he could see was through an open window, a safe haven from the storm.

But when he pulled his tired legs over the window sill, a moist little fist reached out to grab him.

“Eek! Don’t touch that spider!” shrieked the nurse. “Put it down, Baby!” But the tiny tot held Bitsy up to her eyes. The two inspected each other.



“You’re only a baby,” scoffed Bitsy. “But it is worth a try.”

He cleared his throat. “Say ‘beautiful,’” he commanded her.

“Boo...” said the baby.

“Beau-ti-ful,” coached Bitsy.

“Boo,” said the baby. “Boo ... ugly.” And her nose crinkled up as she threw him away.





“I hate babies!” groaned Bitsy, as he landed next to the dozing palace cat, Duchess. He looked at the furry feline. “It’s only a cat,” he muttered to himself, “but it might break my spell.”

“Hey, you!” Bitsy demanded. “Wake up, you fat old thing! You think I’m beautiful, don’t you?”

Duchess opened one eye and stared at him.



“I think it’s going to work!” he thought.

The cat licked her lips and purred. A happy sound.
A helpful sound. A hungry sound!

“No, no, NO!” shrieked Bitsy. “I am not a beautiful snack!” He dodged her swatting paw and skittered under the door.

Bitsy found himself in a grand ballroom bathed in candlelight and music. He had to twirl and leap to avoid the feet of dancing lords and ladies.

“I need to be careful,” Bitsy told himself. “So far, I have been almost squashed and almost eaten. I don’t want to be stepped on now!” He scrambled up a chandelier.



“Lords and ladies!” Bitsy called down. “I may look like a spider, but I’m under an enchantment. You must help me!”

A flurry of shrieks broke out below him. Lords gasped. Ladies tripped and fell *SPLAT* on their faces. Knights brandished their swords, but they couldn’t reach Bitsy. Bitsy dodged the frightened folk and retreated to the balcony.





“This is harder than I thought,” Bitsy groaned. “Isn’t there anyone in this palace who will hear my plea?”

But Bitsy was not alone. A knight named Sir Lionel stood on the balcony gaping at him.

“Did you...speak?” whispered the knight.

Bitsy nodded. “I’m not really a spider. I’m a boy under a spell,” he explained. “You can free me if you say that I’m beautiful.”

Sir Lionel's mouth dropped open. "If I say what?"
"Just say I'm beautiful. That's all you need to do!"
begged Bitsy.

The knight shrugged. "I can't believe I'm talking to
a spider. But here goes. You're beautiful."



Bitsy looked at his legs. They tingled a little bit.
But nothing changed. He was still a spider.



By now the knight was eyeing him suspiciously.

“Why isn’t it working?” gasped Bitsy. “It should be working!”

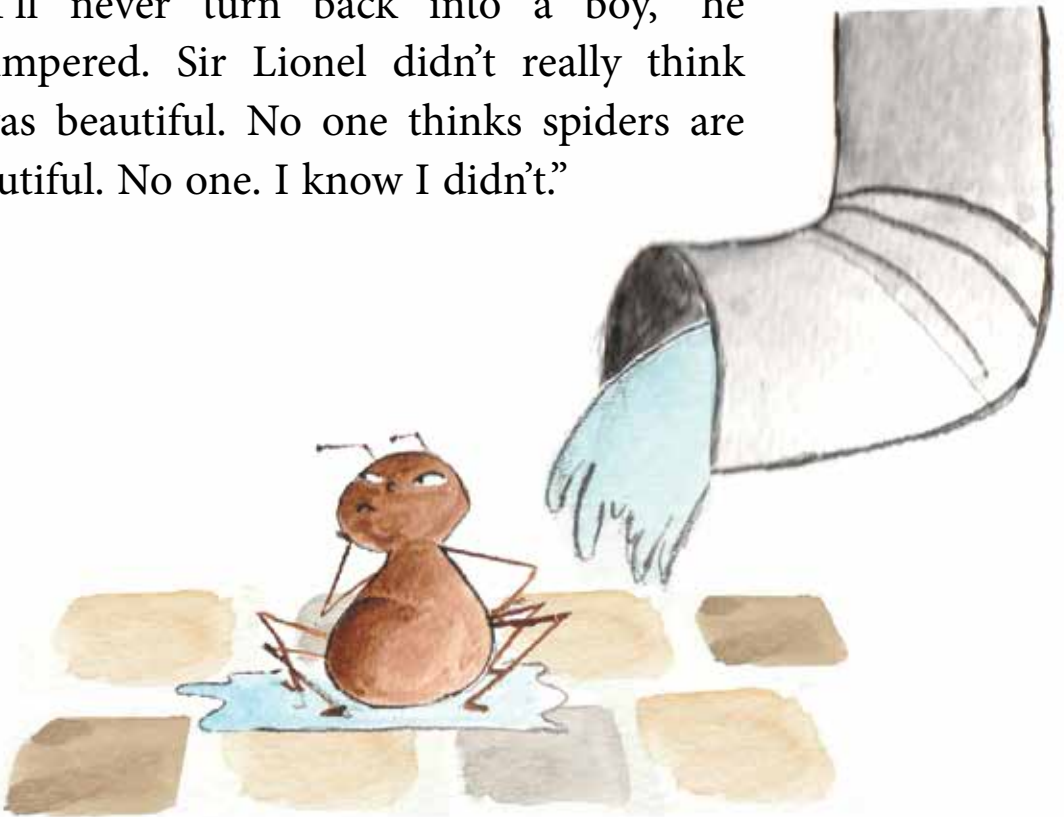
“Hmmp!” said Sir Lionel. “The only thing sillier than a beautiful spider is a knight who talks to spiders!” With that, he brushed Bitsy off the balcony and into the rain gutter.





Poor Bitsy! The rain caught him. It tossed and twirled him. It doused and dunked him. When he finally landed in the kitchen courtyard, he felt bruised. And hopeless. And smaller than he had ever felt in his life.

“I’ll never turn back into a boy,” he whimpered. Sir Lionel didn’t really think I was beautiful. No one thinks spiders are beautiful. No one. I know I didn’t.”





Tears welled up in Bitsy's eyes as he recalled happy days at home. Would he ever hug his parents again? Would he ever laugh and joke with his friends? Bitsy started to sob. He was doomed to remain an ugly, unlikeable spider forever.

As Bitsy wailed in the walkway, he saw two kitchen maids come towards him. He recognized one as Meg.

“If only I hadn’t been so rude to Meg in the past!” Bitsy moaned. “Even if I asked her to help now, she can’t break the spell. No one really thinks spiders are beautiful.”

He curled up into a little ball in the middle of the path.

“Ew, Meg, an ugly spider!” yelled the maid with the milk. She dropped the bucket and dashed into the kitchen.





Meg didn't run. She studied Bitsy. "It must be lonely being a spider," she mused. "I wouldn't want people to say, 'Ew, an ugly girl,' when they saw me."

Bitsy didn't have the heart to say anything. She picked him up and held him gently on her palm. "You shouldn't be stepped on, even if you are a plain little spider."

Bitsy felt warmed by her words. Meg placed him carefully on a windowsill.

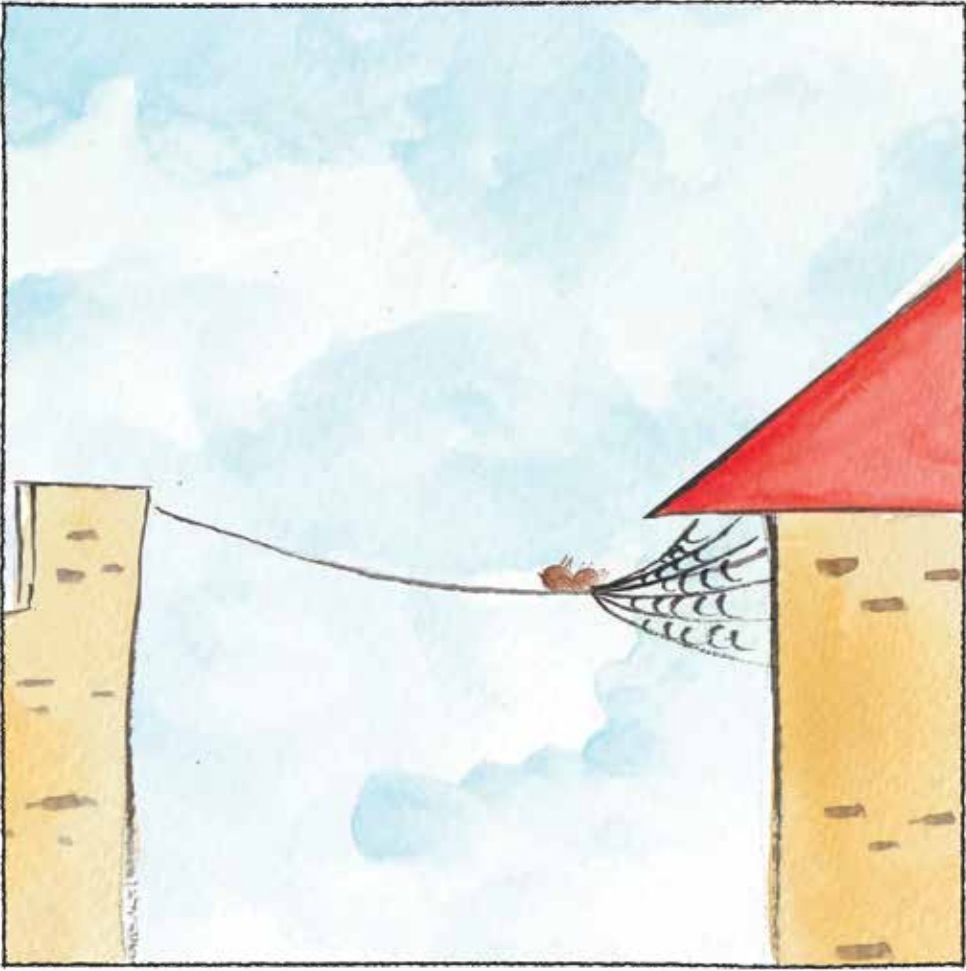
“Goodbye, little spider,” she said. “I have chores to finish. Don’t worry, no one will step on you here.”

Bitsy raised his head. “Wait!” he whispered.

But Meg did not hear him. He waved a forlorn goodbye.

“Meg was the first person who was kind to me all day,” he thought. “Even though she saw nothing but an ugly spider.”



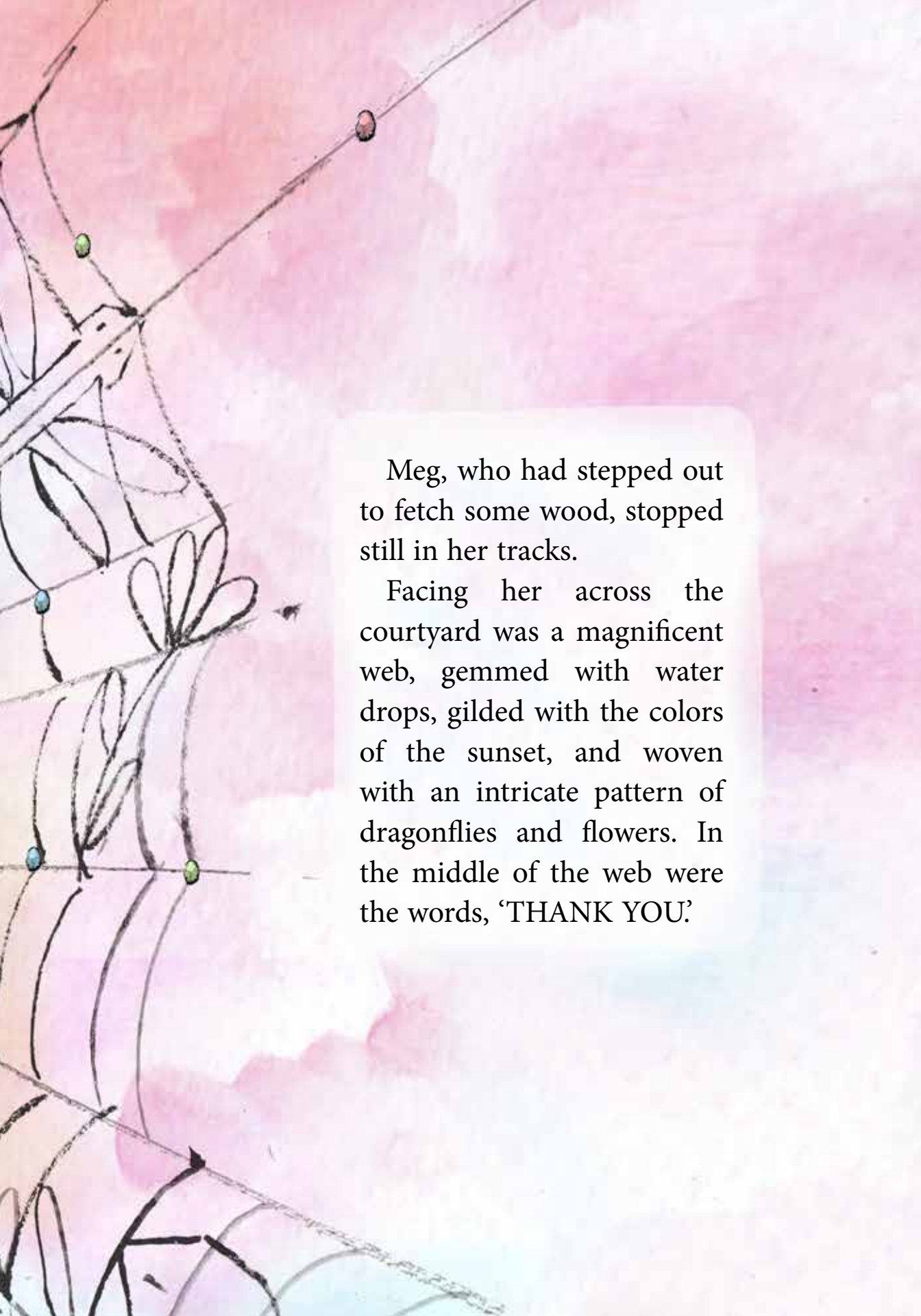


Then he felt the beginning of something he'd never felt before. A glow of gratitude warmed his cold little heart.

"I wish I could thank Meg," he said aloud. "But how can I as a spider?"

Then a brilliant idea came to him. What were spiders skilled at doing? Yes! Weaving webs! He would write his thanks in a web of gossamer! He climbed to the corner of the kitchen wall and started spinning. His legs flew as he wove. He finished just as the setting sun broke through the clouds.



A watercolor illustration of a spider web. The web is drawn with thin black lines and is adorned with several small, colorful beads in shades of green, blue, and red. A dragonfly is perched on one of the web's strands. The background is a soft, pinkish-purple wash. The text is contained within a white rectangular box on the right side of the page.

Meg, who had stepped out to fetch some wood, stopped still in her tracks.

Facing her across the courtyard was a magnificent web, gemmed with water drops, gilded with the colors of the sunset, and woven with an intricate pattern of dragonflies and flowers. In the middle of the web were the words, 'THANK YOU.'



“Oh,” breathed Meg, clasping her hands. “That’s the most beautiful thing anyone’s ever made me! The creator of such loveliness must have a truly beautiful soul, even if he does have eight legs.”

There was a sudden burst of light and Bitsy landed on his feet in the courtyard. His own two feet.



Bitsy stared down at his boots. Then he whooped with delight.

“A thousand thanks!” he cried, running across the courtyard to hug Meg, “I am my old self again!”

Meg’s mouth fell open. She could not quite believe her eyes. Had that spider just turned into the fisherman boy? Then a smile dimpled her cheeks.

“You don’t seem like your old self,” she smiled. “The Bitsy of yesterday would never have thanked me. Or hugged me.”

Bitsy cleared his throat and looked down at his feet. “I wasn’t very nice to anyone,” he admitted. “I guess it took being a spider to see that. I’m sorry.”





“Well,” said Meg, taking him by the hand, “I would love to hear your fascinating tale. Won’t you come inside and have a bit of supper?”

So the two new friends shared a delicious meal of bread and cheese and talked into the night. And from that day forward, Bitsy was kind to everyone and everything – even little spiders.

J. M. Simpson is a children's author with a youthful spirit, a lifelong love of literature, and a fondness for tea. She resides in North Carolina, surrounded by old mountains and young children.

Sandra Rodriguez has always loved drawing beautiful and silly things to make children smile. She lives in London with her husband and two lovely daughters.

