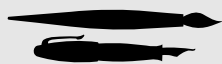


STEALING
our way
HOME

CECILIA
GALANTE



Scholastic Press/New York

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Chapter 1

PIPPA

Two weeks after Mom died, I got a letter and a book in the mail.

This is what the letter said:

Dear Pippa,

My name is Miss Rhodes, and I am going to be your fourth-grade social studies teacher next year. I am really looking forward to getting to know you and the rest of your class.

*Since we will begin the fall term by learning about Greek culture, I always ask all of my students to read *Tito the Warrior* (which I have enclosed) over the summer. Tito, as you will soon find out, was only a few years older than you. He lived in a part of Greece called Sparta and was raised to be a Spartan soldier. To this day, Spartans are regarded as some of the most courageous people who ever lived.*

As you read the book, please jot down at least six facts about the Spartans that you think might be important to share with the rest of the class. We'll discuss the book and go over the information you've collected during the first week of school, so please come prepared.

Have a wonderful summer, and I'll see you soon!

Sincerely,

Miss Rhonda Rhodes

I stretched out on my bed and read the letter twice, all the way through. I liked the two R's in my new teacher's name, the way they rolled over my tongue when I said them. My friend Susan can actually make a trilling sound when she says her R's, almost like she is speaking Spanish, but I've never learned how to do that.

Miss Rhonda Rhodes.

She sounded pretty. Maybe even nice. Even if she was assigning homework over the summer.

But I groaned when I picked up the book and looked at it. Definitely not my thing. The boy on the cover, who I guess was supposed to be Tito the Warrior, and which meant (at least according to Miss Rhodes) that he was just a few years older than me, looked like some weird old guy who was trying to pass as a kid. He was dressed in a long red robe and gold sandals that strapped up to his knees, and his face was all scrunched up, as if the artist had been trying to make him look fierce but instead just

made him look as if he had a really bad stomachache. Plus, he was leaning forward at a weird angle, sort of crouching a little with his hands spread out in front of him, like he was about to pounce on someone or catch something. It was strange.

But who cared about school anyway? Or some dumb kid named Tito? What kind of name was Tito anyway?

Mom was gone.

Forever.

And there was nothing that anybody could do to bring her back.

I slid *Tito the Warrior* between the side of my bed and the wall. Then I crumpled the letter up into a little ball and threw it in the trash can. It bounced off the lip and rolled into the corner.

Sorry, Miss Rhonda Rhodes.

Not this year.

Not this girl.