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Mary and the Mystery Dog

Wofram Hanel
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It's the month of March and still very cold—the midwinter vacation that Mary and her parents spend at their home on the beach turns out to be more than just relaxing inside by the fire. In Hanel's excellently crafted Mary and the Mystery Dog, the reader views the story through Mary's eyes and quickly develops a sympathetic understanding toward the young girl's plight.

March's disagreeable weather provides Mary's parents with the perfect excuse to simply wile their vacation away lounging comfortably indoors, but for Mary such sedentary behavior will not suffice—so she decides to explore the wonders of the beach by herself. While tasting the mist from the sea, chasing seagulls and collecting sea shore treasures, Mary is "suddenly surprised" by the appearance of something large and shaggy bounding-up from behind the sand dunes—It's the mystery dog that Mary had heard stories about; the dog that "lived all alone at the beach in a hut behind the dunes." They immediately take a liking to one another, and spend the remainder of the morning playing on the beach until Mary's father appears calling her for lunch.

Exhausted, exhilarated and too excited to eat, Mary tells her parents about her adventures and her discovery of the beach's mystery dog. Mary's parents do not believe that a beach "mystery dog" had ever existed, which sparks Mary to insist that her parents go with her to "see" the dog.

The story concludes with Mary's parents finding and actually playing with the famed "mystery dog"; however, the mystery is not so much the issue regarding the dog living mysteriously alone behind the sand dunes, but rather how this seemingly unfamiliar animal reacquaints Mary's parents with the joyous pleasures of childhood.

The grayish pastel watercolor illustrations of Kirsten Hocker are beautifully connected with the text of the story. An enduring title for children of all ages.
(May / June 1999)

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