

## Ollie Come Free

**Timothy Patrick**

**Ujala Shahid, Illustrator**

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*Ollie Come Free is a meticulous novel about a family forever changed by one unexpected day.*

In Timothy Patrick's young adult novel *Ollie Come Free*, a precocious boy becomes an artistic savant after being struck by lightning.

In late 1980s Southern California, on the anniversary of the day his father lost three platoon members in Vietnam, eleven-year-old Ollie is struck by lightning during a Little League game. The accident leaves him with trauma and neurological damage. He rocks compulsively, develops a sensory processing disorder, and parrots a trait known as echolalia. It also unleashes a remarkable artistic talent in him, though.

Ollie's new talent is nurtured by his parents, extended family, doctors, teachers, and community. Guided by parents, he becomes determined to focus on the talent, rather than treat his potentially debilitating condition. He becomes famous for massive, stunningly precise drawings of city skylines that are completed over a series of days. He provides for himself financially, falls in love, and becomes a father (albeit in a somewhat untraditional way).

Ollie's most persistent nemesis is not his brain damage, but his older brother, Cody. A handsome star athlete, Cody devolves over the course of the novel from a jealous sibling to a washed-out baseball protégé; his fall leads into revenge-driven murderous impulses.

With fascinating classical echoes, the book's structure is chiasmatic: the more Ollie succeeds through his gentleness and open heart, the more Cody falls from grace, wallowing in bitterness, anger, and a poisonous sense of entitlement and misplaced indignation. Where Cody leaves a path of destruction and chaos in his wake, Ollie creates a sense of community that is inclusive and full of wonder. Good versus evil, childlike creativity versus Machiavellian cunning, and loyalty versus deception: these familiar conflicts provide an abundance of natural forward motion.

In a novel overflowing with interesting characters, one of the most interesting is the family's ranch. One of the last cattle ranches in Southern California, it's under constant threat of insolvency. The ranch is a throwback to another time; it lacks the vertical integration required of modern livestock producers. But what it lacks in modern efficiencies it makes up for with a deep history, requisite legends, and an artistic savant with an attachment to the land who overcomes all obstacles.

Classified as a young adult book but perfect for all, *Ollie Come Free* is a surprising, rewarding page-turner. At its core, it is a novel about family, love, and the resilience of the human spirit. Its pacing and storytelling is well honed, and its deep dive into savant research, coupled with a search for buried treasure, are natural parts of its sweeping story.

*Ollie Come Free* is a meticulous novel about a family forever changed by one unexpected day.

KLAY DYER (April 16, 2021)

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