

Sarah So Small

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Quentin Greban, Illustrator

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Having inadvertently swallowed a magic pearl that her father stole from a good witch, Sarah begins to shrink. At five years old, she becomes so small that her parents cannot allow her to attend school. Is all hope lost for Sarah?

While the magic pearl has caused her to shrink, it has also blessed her with the ability to communicate with animals. The author cleverly has Sarah find a solution to her problem with the help of her animal friends, like the field mouse who tells her, "I'm as small as you are. ... You are not alone." Flying with her friend the stork, "Sarah feels bigger than all the tiny houses she flies over. This makes her feel brave." Her experiences teach her to be a bigger person in more than just the physical sense.

The father in this tale never shows any remorse for stealing the pearl. He is clearly upset about his daughters shrinking, but he doesn't offer an apology or take responsibility. "But," the author warns, "fate rarely ignores dishonest people." The father's attitude is addressed toward the end of the book when the good witch, Hazel, says, "Remind your father to come and apologize. If not I will turn him into a blue toad." Hazel also tells Sarah (and the reader), "I would have preferred to see you here with your father, but it is very brave of you to have traveled this far."

The hidden message—about the consequences that people suffer when they make bad choices—is an added bonus to this picture book. Parents may feel uncomfortable having such a young heroine traveling alone to resolve an issue caused by her father, but the lessons Sarah learns on the journey and her growing ability to solve her own problems may compensate for this difficulty.

The sweet, fanciful illustrations deepen the book's emotional experience. The art depicts everyday items that the reader will recognize to show just how little Sarah really is. She can take a bath in a teacup and fit in her father's pocket! The illustrators' obviously clear understanding of the text might be due in part to his relationship with the author: the two are brothers. Born in Brussels, they both have an affinity for children's books, and the author has also worked as a casting director, photographer, filmmaker, and make-up artist.

Sarah is a charming little girl to whom readers will easily relate. She shows honest emotion about her situation, but has the strength to refuse to accept that shrinking is her fate. This appealing character, portrayed with the author's hidden message and the gentle illustrations, make this a picture book that children will pick up again and again.

TROY-MICHELLE REINHARDT (August 18, 2009)

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