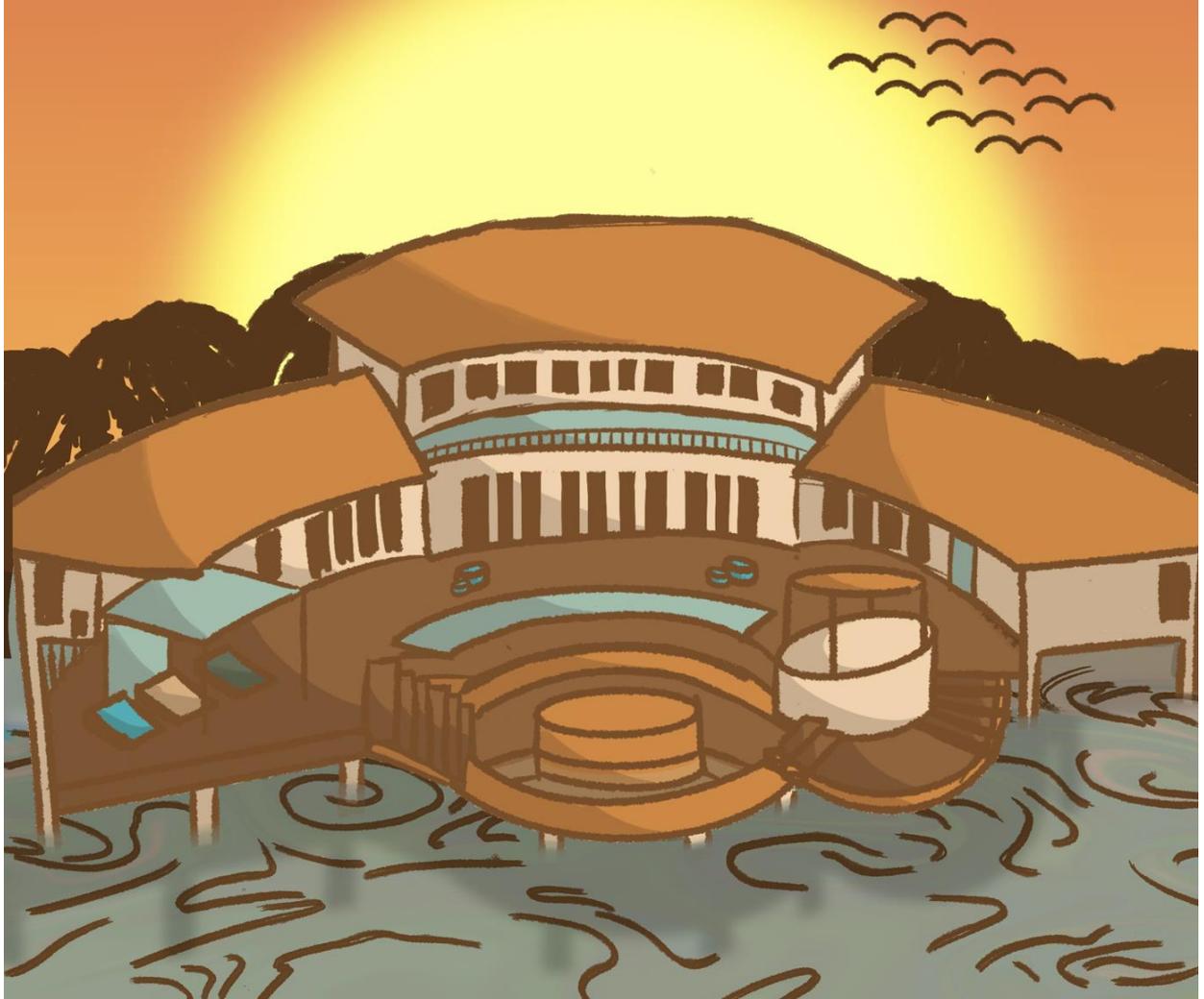


Ruby by the Sea

By Potato Rats

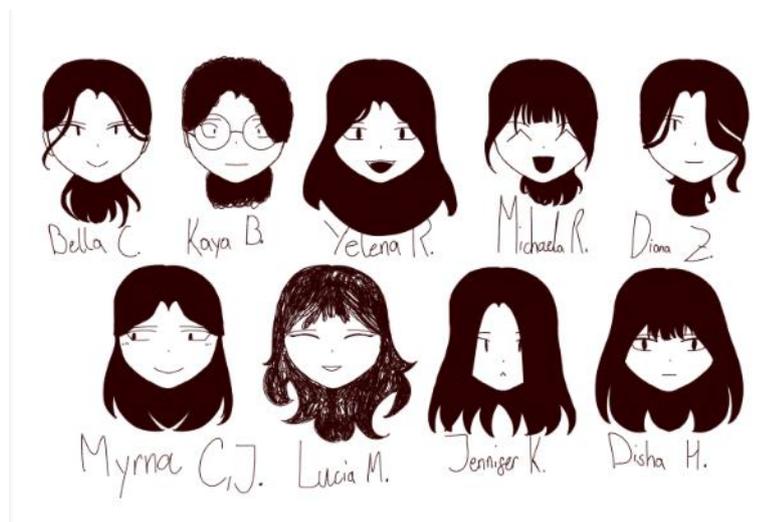


This story is dedicated to those who seek adventure, despite the ups and downs through life you push through. You are our inspirations for this story.

A big thankyou towards every single person who helped and contributed to create this book. Thank you so much to the teachers who gave up their time to make this book happen.

And to those who find themselves struggling:

You are not alone and can find friends along the way even the unexpected places.



Copyright:

Published by Potato Rats, Box Hill High School, 1180 Whitehorse Road, Kaya Beasley, Bella Cobb, Lucia Major, Jennifer Khun, Disha Hamal, Yelena Roberts, Michaela Roberts, Diana Zamanikia, Myrna Chantaraparp-Johnston

Copyright © 2023, Potato Rats

All rights reserved. This book is copyright. Apart from the purposes of private study, research, criticism, or review, as permitted under Copyright Act, no part may be reproduced by any process without written permission. Enquires should be made to the publisher.

Prologue:

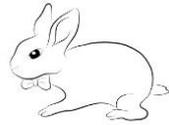
I've always had an interest in volunteer work, I think that I take after my mum like that, which was why I wanted to volunteer at the animal shelter down the road. I talked to Rosa last night on the phone and she said she was happy to have me come help. Despite her reassurance, the butterflies swarmed my stomach again. I brushed my vibrant red braids away from my face and swept my sweaty palms against my pants before I walked into the shelter. It was so cold inside; a **shiver** ran down my spine. The shelter felt miserable and lonely, goose bumps appeared on my arms when I heard all the dogs howling. Looking around, it made me feel sick. I then heard a gentle voice call out across the big foyer.

“**Ruby!** You're here, finally. I wondered if you were going to show up!” Rosa, the shelter owner smiled at me, she looked young compared to her voice. Her blonde bob cut short at her chin, big green eyes, and plump lips greet me with a friendly grin, which I returned with an unsure wave of my hand.

“Where would you like me to start, Rosa?” I asked shyly. “I was thinking you can work with the rabbits?” The mention of rabbits made me smile and nod enthusiastically, she guided me towards where the rabbits were kept. I crouched down next to the first cage, two rabbits huddled together in the corner. I heard Rosa's footsteps fade away, so I crept across the floor as quietly as I could so I wouldn't wake them. I fetched out the set of keys that Rosa gave to me and opened the cage door. One of the rabbits opened their tiny eyes and hopped towards me, it was white and had a cute little red bow tie. It was sitting right next to me now, so I slowly held out my hand for the bunny to sniff. I felt its warm breath against my hand, and I locked eyes with it. I immediately knew that we had a connection, as silly as it sounded. My heartbeat slowed and I instantaneously felt calmer. Then, I slowly placed my hand on the rabbits back and started stroking it.

“Ruby! I need your help with the dogs!” Rosa's voice carried loudly across the shelter, along with the noise of barking and howling. I sighed, as I realized I'd have to move. I felt the rabbit tense up in my arms as the dogs continued to bark in chaos.

“Don't worry. I will come back for you. I swear on my life! I'll ask mum, she's sure to say yes, otherwise I'll just have to wait until I save up enough money, I'll come back and adopt you. It can be you and me forever. I'll call you Willow.” I told the rabbit as I placed it gently back into the corner of the cage with the other one, locking it up before racing off towards Rosa. I took one last glance at the cage and swore to myself that I'd fulfill my promise.



Chapter 1

2 years later

I slipped Willow into the front pocket of my apron after I got into my work uniform, I hoped no one would notice her. The thought of telling dad about Willow stressed me out. I walked out of the staff room into the restaurant. It was overwhelmingly loud inside; I heard my dad, the owner, and head chef, shouting from inside the kitchen and the chefs screaming at each other. The customers gathered around the tables, and wouldn't stop yabbering on, which gave me this overwhelmingly tense claustrophobic sensation. I needed to get some fresh air, I couldn't have handled the pressure of my dad's disapproval, so I walked out onto the balcony near the quiet chatter of the customers. Outside was quieter. I had taken a deep breath. That always helped me calm down. The thick salty air brushed against my face as I walked past the customers who were sitting outside. I noticed how beautiful the beach was, the waves crashed against the shore and sparkled in the sun. A couple of seagulls were fighting over a bag of fresh hot chips that a little kid had dropped. Everything felt calmer around the beach, especially in the summertime.



I walked back into the centre of the restaurant, and I heard a voice. A familiar voice with a thick French accent, that could only belong to one person, Dad. A

sudden crash of a tray hit the floor. My first instinct was to rush over and see what was happening. I hurried into the greasy kitchen while I held my apron to support Willow, and I saw my dad throwing another one of his tantrums. I started stroking Willow, trying to reassure her that everything was alright. I knew it was wrong, buying an animal without dad knowing, but I couldn't resist, we had an instant connection. When he found out, he was going to get so angry. When I was younger, I had always begged for an animal. But he wasn't the one that liked animals, mum was, but ever since mum left us, he despised them. I think it's simply because they reminded him of her.

"Get the bread out of the oven before the cheese **melts!**" I heard dad scream.

"Hey, Dad, I need to tell you something." I said quietly, while shifting on my feet. I had a feeling how my dad would react, but I needed to tell him.

"Not right now mon-cheri, Papa is very busy." He stated while rushing up and down the kitchen. He spoke to one of the younger chefs, pointing to some equipment and food, more than likely giving him some tips.

"Dad!" I yelled at the top of my lungs. I felt Willow jerk from inside my apron pocket, so I started to stroke her. Everyone stopped. I *never* yelled, even Willow knew that. The kitchen fell silent, but the chefs knew better than to stop cooking. My dad approaches me carefully as if I'm some wild animal waiting to attack. I count to 10, taking deep breaths in and out as I'm stroking Willow carefully.

"Dad, you know how I have been saving up money at the shelter?"

"*Oui, oui.* Of course, I know!" he muttered.

"Well, I've saved up enough money to get Willow!" I told him pointing proudly at her, picking up her up and holding Willow up to him. The chefs murmur and take sneaky glances at Willow. I watched as his face turned red.

"You...WHAT? GET THIS THING OUT OF HERE!" He screamed at me, and I shrunk back. "RABBITS ARE **NOT** ALLOWED INSIDE A RESTAURANT, LET ALONE THE KITCHEN!"

"I.. I just... I just thought that it would be nice to have an animal around. And when I met Willow. We just kind of had a connection."

"A CONNECTION!" Yelled dad. "That's so stupid" he threw his hands up in the air, anyone watching would think that I'd just told him I had superpowers.

"Please Dad, please let me keep Willow, I promise I will be responsible." I begged. "I've been saving up money to pay for her cage, hay, food, and everything else! I'm 15 now and I can look after a small rabbit."

“I know you are still upset about me and your mum, but that doesn't mean you go off and buy rabbits.” He said angrily.

“I'm not that upset, ok? I'm not some little 5-year-old who needs to understand why their mummy and daddy no longer are living with each other!” I shrieked.

“Ruby! Just...” He huffed. “Get that...thing! **Out** of my kitchen, it's probably spreading rabies into the food and kitchen! Just get. It. **OUT!**” He screamed.

“But Dad! I can-!” I protested.

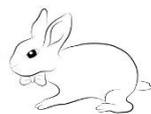
“I do not have time for this Ruby! Just do your job and let me do these orders.” He says as he runs a hand through his hair.

“Chef Pierre!” Called a waiter. He paced over to the other side of the kitchen.

“Go, Ruby. Now.” He frustratedly yelled.

I sighed in defeat and walked over to the serving table. There was no way I was sending Willow back, no matter what he said. Another waiter came over to me. He was tall, slim and had a long-crooked nose and opened his mouth to speak.

“Table 5 needs a clean-up, go ahead and do that.” he said, I glared at him as he was putting more cups into the cupboard. I sighed and nodded to myself and went ahead through the kitchen door and headed for table 5. As I was stacking the dishes, I thought to myself, *I am so fed up with my dad saying no to everything. I am responsible enough to look after Willow. Mum would've let me, so why is dad not letting me, I'm 15, I can look after myself and a rabbit, it's not fair! Who cares. I'm keeping her no matter what my dad says!*



Chapter 2

“I have no ideas for any new recipes!” Dad yelled angrily to himself, gripping on to the kitchen counter.

“Wait, what about that stupid rabbit of yours since you're now keeping it.” he said turning towards me.

“We can use that for our new recipe!”

“What, no you psycho! You’re not going to cook my pet!” I said in a screechy voice. It really felt unnatural to yell, especially at my dad.

“Willow’s my child!”

“Ugh!” he groaned with frustration. “I can get you a new rabbit, one that’s not filled with rabies and from the shelter.” he pleaded.

“NO!” I demanded.

“Dad, we serve seafood, not rabbit! How about we go fishing and snorkelling for some fish, I think customers would love to know that our seafood is from right here in the **Great Barrier Reef**. And hey, we might make a lot of new popular recipes.” I suggested.

“I am not swimming, I’m a chef.” He uttered and crossed his arms over his chest.

“It’s snorkelling dad, you’ll be fine, and you love going out on the boat. Take the afternoon off from work.” I said, but he frowned at my suggestion.

“I will not take the day off work to swim. I refuse.” He scowled, turning his head away from me. I inwardly groaned.

“Come on, it will be fun, we can go together, have some bonding time, just the two of us. It could be just like when I was younger.” I said with pleading eyes.

“Fine, if it doesn’t work, I’ll cook your rabbit, let’s go get the boat.” he said as we left the restaurant. I rolled my eyes at his tone.



We left the restaurant in silence; and continued in silence as we walked along the beach towards our boat. The memories flooded back. Me, mum, and dad walking along the sand, my small hands swinging between their hands. I quickly pushed the memory aside, as I climbed onto the boat and put Willow into a cardboard box, then climbed into my wetsuit. I forgot the cage at home, so I used the cardboard box to contain her. The boat started abruptly, making me lose my balance and stumble. “Sorry Willow.” I murmured under my breath. I finally managed to sit down on a bench and peer over the edge as the boat moved over the waves.

The reef was so pretty, it glistened in the sunlight, you could see all the vibrant corals and fish, the water was crystal clear, it almost seemed mystical. The boat

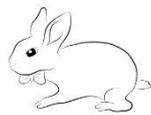
swayed slightly from the gentle waves. Dad squeezed into his wetsuit, barely fitting. I walked over to Willow.

“Willow, I’ll be back, ok? You just stay here.” I told Willow, as I left her in her cardboard box.

Dad walked out, his face covered in purple outrage. “This is horrible Ruby! It’s too *serré!*” It is too *Tight!* My dad groaned. “Get me out of this ridiculous thing!”

“Dad! You have to wear it; it’s supposed to be tight! You know you’re going to love this. It’s just like we used to, remember?” I knew it was a little more than tight on him, but I was not going to tell him that. The breeze picked up then, spraying us with sea salt. Dad lowered himself into the water, it was frigid “Gah! So cold! Why do you do this to me Ruby?” He cried, throwing his hands up in the air. I watched my dad swim aimlessly, treading around a while before I said “You’ll be fine dad don’t worry.” While I jumped into the water, feeling the frigid sea. “I cannot believe you made me swim!” He howled.

“Dad, you want a new recipe or not? It’s not *that* bad.” He frowned but said nothing. We finally stop in a deeper part of the reef. I slink into a memory from the last time we went snorkelling. I must’ve been 10, maybe 11, everyone was so happy, no yelling, no arguing, no moving to America. It was a bliss.



Chapter 3

The water splashed against my chest making me **shiver**. The water was crystal clear and a vibrant blue with glossy waves sloshing against the boat. It was all truly magnificent, there were so many tropical fish, all different shapes, sizes, and colours. The coral and **sponge** were just like the fish, I felt like I was 10 again. A turtle swam past, and I resisted the urge to touch its beautiful shell. The salty and fresh air entered my nostrils. I dove under the water the fresh water splashing my face. I poked dad signing him to go up to the surface I break from the under the surface and remove the snorkel mouthpiece. “Look, a cave dad!” I point further ahead, the top of a cave pokes above water.

“There’s got to be some cool fishes there.” I said excitedly Dad looks over at me and smiles, “You look just like your mother right now and sure let’s go.” he says with a genuine grin I respond with a smile, teeth, and all. We swam over to the cave and spotted a rainbow-coloured fish, I don’t think I’ve ever seen a fish like

that. Dad turned around pointed out the fish probably thinking the same thing that I was. He swam deeper.

“Dad, don’t go too far, you’re going to get lost!” I called out after him, but he couldn’t hear me through the mask and water. I picked up the pace to catch up with him and dove into the cave. There was a small air pocket gap where I could breathe. It was dark, and it smelled musty. I shifted uncomfortably in the small space of the cave, the cave was dead silent. I heard the splashes of my dad then his heavy breathing.

“Can you see it?” He asked, his voice echoed in the cave, something wet and slimy glided across my leg and I couldn’t help but scream. “Ey! Don’t try and make me deaf girl.” I heard him move across the cave swiftly, “Where is that bugga?” He growled and I knew he tried to find it with his hands.

“Dad we can't see, there could be something dangerous in here!” He ignored me and continued moving around, there wasn’t much space in there, it made me feel claustrophobic. “Dad! We should just go. We can find another fish.”

“No Ruby! I had to go through *all* this just to not get this fish?” He grunted. Then I heard rocks crumble and a scream

“Dad what’s wrong?” My chest tightened and my stomach twisted itself into a knot.



Chapter 4

My mind was racing as my dad kept on screaming at me to help him. I tried pulling his leg but ended up scraping them even harder against the sharp edges of the rocks, he screamed in pain gripping on to my shoulder harder.

“It's stuck! What do I do?” he cried, his hands clamping on to his leg struggling to get it out.

I stared at the fish that we followed in. Admiring its beautiful, majestic colours. “Control your breathing, we're going to run out of oxygen” I said. I knew we were running out of oxygen, very slowly.

“Wasn't the water at my waist before?” My dad said pointing to his massive chubby waist. The water had in-fact, risen above his waist, and the water was just at the bottom of my chin.

“Oh no, it means the water is rising.” I exclaimed, starting to panic. I felt my chest tightening as I breathed harder. I couldn't breathe properly, it was too dark, and there wasn't enough space in this tiny cave.

“Isn't that that stupid rabbit of yours's?” he asked in a quiet voice knowing he was going to faint.

“What do you mean, dad? Willow is back at-” I asked confusedly, but he had cut me off.

“Ah, there it is.” Dad said, pointing at Willow. My jaw dropped when I saw Willow appear in the cave. Willow swam backwards as she placed her hind legs against the rocks. She then pushed all her force onto the rocks, and they tumbled down onto the floor, it revealed the rock that was against dad's leg that had made him stuck. He wriggled free, he then winced from the pain. Light poured into the room, making me feel relieved. Dad exhaled a massive breath.

“You bloody legend.” dad exclaimed swam out of the cave.

“Willow, you did it!” I yelled swam toward the exit.

“Thank goodness we're saved” my dad said paddling. He glanced at me before he took another breath and swam across to the boat.



“Not a stupid rabbit after all.” Dad muttered under his breath, timidly, he admitted he was wrong.

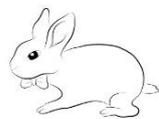
I took a huge breath and dove underwater. With every single stroke I did I felt the force of the water forcing me forward. I reached to the surface of the water rubbed my eyes because of the salty water. I looked over to my dad and saw him gasping for air. I swam a full circle looking for Willow. I heard faint splashing before Willow appeared out of the water, she paddled towards me. I picked her up, while treading through the water. We slowly and carefully made our way back to the boat. I pulled myself onto the boat before reaching back over the boat to help pull dad out.

“Told you I wasn’t cut out for swimming.” he said as he slowly got up, he pulled himself up onto the boat making it tip to a side. I hopped next to my dad, as I held a soaking wet Willow in my arms.

“Dad! It’s a five-tailed Wolf fin fish!” I pointed out to the fish not far from us. “Ah! Fabuleux!” *Fabulous!* He exclaimed, he raced for his fishing rod. He threw it into the water with his best bait on the hook. We waited in suspense, praying for the fish to take the bait. I watched as the rod tugged, once, then twice before dad pulled the rod upwards then reeled the line in. The fish flew through the air, and landed with a thump on the boat.

“Guess you found that new recipe after all.” I laughed gleefully. He placed the fish into the bucket. He shook his head, with a huge grin stuck on his face.

“A five tail wolf fin fish.” He said dusting of his hand. “This will taste delicious with some lemon, rosemary and thyme!” He grinned at me.



Chapter 5

The boat ride back was wobbly, we had to keep stopping so dad could contaminate the water with his lunch. I could smell the vomit penetrating into my nose. The times when we stopped, I managed to get Willow out of her cardboard box and fully dry her just in time to arrive back at shore. We both got off and unloaded our supplies. I hopped off and carried Willow in her cardboard box. We arrived back at the restaurant just when it closed. We sat down at a

table in silence. My fingers drummed against the table. I sipped my lychee drink as he cleared his throat.

“I just want to say thank you Ruby, without you and Willow, I wouldn’t have come up with an amazing new recipe for my menu.”

“You were kidding about cooking Willow, right?” I asked, as I held the now dry rabbit in my arms, she still shivered occasionally, and I huddled her closer to my body to transfer my heat.

“Yes, I definitely was.” He chuckled, some part of me doubted he was joking. The waiter came and placed the cooked fish on to the table. It smelt amazing; the smell of the fish mixed with thyme and rosemary along with other delicious smells made it 10 times better. “Your dish monsieur.” he said, and then he walked away.

“It looks good” I said breaking the awkward silence and brushing aside my red plaits. I grabbed my cutlery and cut of a piece carefully. I chewed slowly, spreading the strong flavour all around my mouth.

“It’s very **tasty**, dad.” I said smiling at him.

“That’s wonderful” he said placing down his fork. I watched as he shifted uncomfortably.

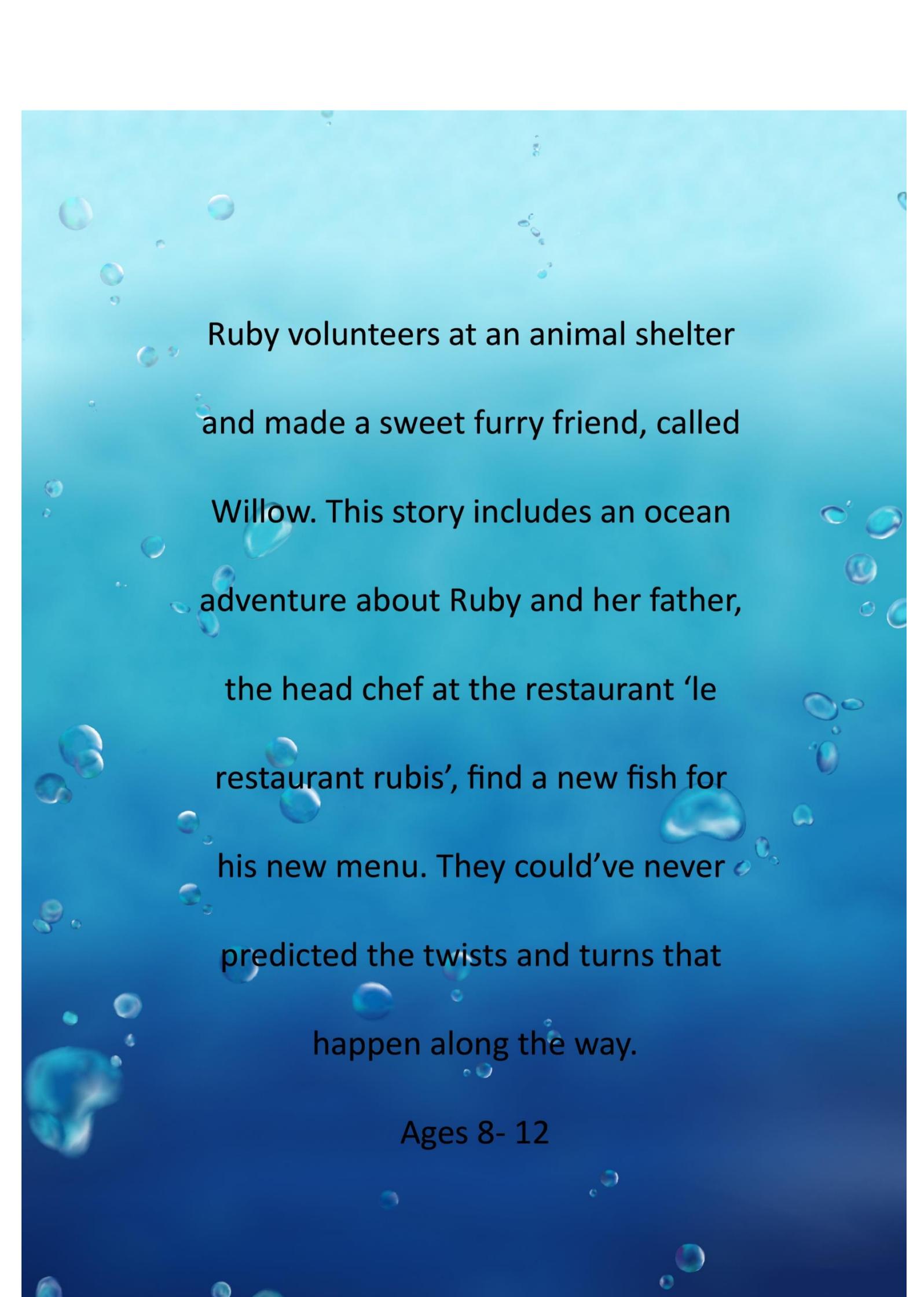
“Now Ruby, realising how I treated you I apologise how I behaved about Willow.” Dad said reluctantly.

“It’s completely fine, I know you have a lot on your plate. You know, with mum and the Restaurant” I replied as I adjusted my position in my seat.

“Just remember you’re my first priority over everything else.” He smiled.

“Now let’s eat this delicious dish, shall we?”





Ruby volunteers at an animal shelter
and made a sweet furry friend, called
Willow. This story includes an ocean
adventure about Ruby and her father,
the head chef at the restaurant 'le
restaurant rubis', find a new fish for
his new menu. They could've never
predicted the twists and turns that
happen along the way.

Ages 8- 12