

Jonathan Miller

By Ralph Fletcher

Andy Steve, and Larry were my best friends. But in some ways my closest best friend was a boy named Jonathan Miller. I met him one summer day at Humarock Beach. We spent no more than five hours together, but I've never forgotten him.

I spotted him standing on one foot at the shore. "I found some snow." I realized he was talking to me.

"What's snow?" I asked.

"I don't know," he replied, grinning. "What's new with you?"

I stared, not sure whether to laugh with him or at him.

"Look at that." He pointed at three little kids trying to dig a wall to protect a sand castle. The tide was coming in, fast, and the castle was in big trouble. He gave me a disgusted look. "They're doing it all wrong. You need to dig a ditch, a real big one."

"Yeah, like a moat," I agreed. "With a wall behind it."

We jumped in to help the little kids. I started making a big sand wall as the first line of defense while Jonathan raced around the beach gathering seaweed and pieces of driftwood to reinforce the wall. My brother Jimmy and two other kids came over to help, all of us digging like crazy. Waves kept attacking, and we kept fighting them off. We managed to protect the castle for another half hour until a big wave finally flattened it.

Jonathan was from Oregon and was visiting his grandparents. Right away I loved him the way you love a best friend. I loved the funny faces he made while telling a stupid joke. We hung around together all day: swimming, looking for shells and sea glass and bottle caps. We built our own sand fort higher up the beach and ate lunch there. Two of my brothers wanted to come in the fort, but I shooed them away. I wasn't ready to share Jonathan, not yet.

I wished that I'd brought something of mine to give him—the inside of a golf ball, an arrowhead, my shark-tooth fossil—but I'd come to the beach with nothing.

"We could be blood brothers," I said. "We'd need a knife, or a sharp shell. Then we have to cut our fingers so the blood can run together."

"We don't need to," Jonathan said, leaning back in the fort. "We're already blood brothers. I know we are."

"Yeah," I said because it was true.

At four o'clock his grandmother yelled. Time for him to go.

"Bye," he said.

"Bye." The lump in my throat made it hard to talk. He started walking away, turned back once to wave, then ran to catch up with his grandparents.

I never saw him again. But whenever anybody mentions Oregon, I always think of Jonathan.