

Jackie's Window

By Andrew Katz

Jackie is drawing at her window,
just as she did yesterday, and the day before that
and the day before that.

She doesn't know how many days have passed
since the whole world stopped.

Staring out at the city—
at the same empty canal,
the same empty streets,
the same empty sky—
she searches for something new to draw.

When she can't find anything new,
she peers even closer
at the things she has drawn before.

When she can't peer any closer,
she moves her chair around
to draw things
from new angles.

And when she has exhausted every angle,
she draws things

that once were
and one day
might be again.

She fixes her eye on the canal,
where the sun is lying flat
and shiny.

With no boats chug, chug, chugging along it,
the canal has changed.

It has turned from muddy brown
to swampy green
to ocean blue,
like . . . a caterpillar
emerging from its cocoon.

For the first time, Jackie can see
straight through the water,
and below the surface
she glimpses
a glimmer
of something new.

The glimmer is *moving*.

And behind it ripples another.

And another.

And another.

Silvery fins,
smooth bodies,
wide tails
flashing.

They move closer, grow brighter,
until poking out through the water
come the bottle-shaped noses
of dolphins.

The sun bounces off their egg-shaped heads.

One of them leaps into the air,
landing with a splash.

They squeak, chirp,
click and whistle,
their conversation rising
all the way

to Jackie's window.

Jackie longs to sneak outside
and take a closer look.

But . . .

instead

she draws.

She chooses among her pencils:

white for their tummies,

black for their eyes,

pink for their tongues.

It takes many shades of grey

to draw their backs.

The colours and curves

grow and grow

beneath her hand

when suddenly

through the streets

come echoing

strange new sounds.

Throaty voices

deep as the rumble of a tuba.

OOOOOOOOH!

OOOOOOOOH!

OOOOOOOOH!

Jackie feels her heart flip and tumble.

She leans over her windowsill to see

heavy-antlered moose

clip-clop into view.

Their giant hooves crush

discarded cans

that lie along the road.

Their knobby knees brush
against leafy plants
that twist up purple and yellow
from the cracked pavement.

The moose amble toward a tree,
where they munch on branches.

Jackie yearns to tiptoe outside
and take a closer look.

But . . .

instead

she picks up a new pencil.

She barely touches it to paper

when shadows

wing across the sidewalk.

Between the high-rises, she can see

the rusty sky

has melted away,

and there,

against the clear blue,

a pair of eagles glide.

They flutter to a landing

on the curved neck of a lamppost.

Their dark wings

fold in at their sides.

Their bald heads

shine white.

Every fiber in Jackie's being

quivers

to go outside

and take a closer look.

But . . .

instead

she dives into the paper.

Her pencils dart,

swirl

and swoop.

She disappears

into the lines and circles,

into the shapes,

the colours

when slowly

she begins to sniff

a warm smell,

like cinnamon buns

and campfire.

She glances up.

Outside,
a colossal creature,
its head filling her window,
peers in.
Its scales, green as spring buds,
glint in the sun.
Polka dots of every colour
prickle and pop.
The creature sweeps its long winding tail
this way and that.
It stares with charcoal eyes
at her drawing.
Jackie steps toward the window.
She has never seen a dragon before.
But if she were to imagine one,
it would look like this.
Carefully, she holds out her drawing.
The dragon peers at it closely,
its eyes roaming over every pencil stroke.
Jackie watches its tongue pant over tremendous teeth.
She feels the heat of its breath.
Finally, the dragon begins to huff and puff.
It spins around

and lowers its neck under the window,
as if inviting her
to hop on.

Jackie freezes.

What does the dragon want to do?

Where does it want to go?

And what will happen

if she ventures beyond her window?

How long ago was it

that she last left her house?

Long enough for her to change—

for her toes to reach the end of her bed,

for her fingers to strengthen

around her pencils.

In all this time,

has the world outside changed too?

As the dragon hovers beside her,

she knows she has to find out.

She grabs her pencils,

her thickest sketchbook.

With a deep breath, she clambers

over the windowsill

onto the dragon's back.

She lays her hand against the dragon,

its scales warm as stones in the sun.

Then together

they climb the wind,

travelling higher

and higher

into the sky.

Holding on tight

to the dragon's golden mane,

Jackie beholds the city below.

Even the tallest building

seems like a tower made of toy blocks.

The park

has no people in it.

Its swings hang

straight and still.

Jackie isn't sure where they're going,

but the dragon seems to know,

and before long,

the mountain

that stands guard

above the city

rises into view.

Its vast canopy of trees,
its pebbly paths
where Jackie used to walk with her grandmother,
its green slopes
where people used to picnic,
all come into focus
as Jackie and the dragon
dive toward it.

They drop below the treetops,
sending a great shiver through the leaves.

They swoop low over the ground,
long grass whipping around Jackie's legs,
until at last they slow
to a stop.

Jackie's chest heaves up
and down.

She lifts her chin
and listens.

The usual cacophony
of growling motors
and honking horns
floating up from the city below,
the usual rumble

of thundering planes
booming down from above,
can't be heard anywhere.
The hush is so quiet
she can hear the whisper
of her own breath.
In all her visits to the mountain,
there has never been
such stillness among the trees.
Sliding off the side of the dragon,
she lands softly on her feet.
She takes a closer look around.
And that is when she sees
many pairs
of eyes
staring back at her.
An owl puffing up its grey feathers
on the crook of a branch.
Two white-spotted deer,
mother and fawn,
peering out from behind a tangled bush.
A bullfrog plopped in a puddle,
as still as a stone.

A fox pausing mid-trot,
its orange ears pointing straight up.

A bear
raising its black snout
from a blueberry patch.

Many of these animals
are strangers to the city.

They must have only come back
because all the people
stayed inside.

The animals keep staring.

They flick an ear.

They twitch a whisker.

They wait to see
what Jackie will do.

Only the dragon
bends its cavernous nostrils toward her.

It gives the sketchbook under her arm
a nudge.

Jackie nods,
understanding now
why the dragon brought her here.

She finds herself a seat on a mossy rock.

Then she opens her sketchbook.
And with the faintest sound
of pencil scratching against paper,
she draws
and draws and draws.
Everywhere she turns,
she finds something new
and also something more.
She draws things
she has never drawn before.
The silence.
The scent of wild violets
blowing through the trees.
The green tendril
peeking out
inside her.
After a while,
the animals, one by one,
turn their heads away,
going back about their business,
all except the dragon,
who stares and stares
at the picture she is making.

The picture grows
and grows
beneath her hand,
Jackie drawing
everything she can,
so that she remembers,
and maybe
so that others remember too,
the time when the whole world
stopped
and something new
began.