

RUBY LEE & ME

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Laced linen frames of horse embroidery (pp. 216–217): de-kay/istockphoto

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CHAPTER ONE



The Accident

It was a perfectly ordinary day, until it wasn't.

Robin played in the sandbox while I read underneath the mimosa tree. I was spending the first day of summer vacation babysitting my sister, or at least I was supposed to be. Before long my mind had drifted clear out of North Carolina, and I was swimming with a dolphin off the English coast.

A loud screech jolted me out of the story. A car, a black car, had hit someone! Bad things *never* happened in our neighborhood. I hid my face in my hands. It couldn't be real.

When I got the courage to look, people were spilling from cars and homes into the street. I dropped my book and ran toward them.

A man I didn't know took charge. "Call an ambulance," he shouted. "Somebody call an ambulance!"

I saw Robin's red tennis shoe abandoned in the street. I yelled. I cried and wailed. She lay on the ground, small and still. When I screamed her name, she tried to get up. Her legs crumpled beneath her.

I got all cold and numb, like I'd been put in the meat locker at Gentry's Grocery. A faraway ambulance siren rang in my ears.

Mama gave me a hard shake. "Sarah, listen to me."

I tried to focus on her face, but it was a blur. Instead I stared at Mama's hands. They were still dirty from working in the vegetable garden.

"I have to go with Robin in the ambulance," Mama said. "Stay with Cathy until I get back."

I was terrified for the ambulance to take Robin away. I might never see her again.

I pulled from Mama's grasp and hurried to where the paramedics were loading Robin onto a stretcher. With her eyes closed, she didn't look six years old. She looked like a baby.

I fell to my knees. Why did this have to happen? Why?