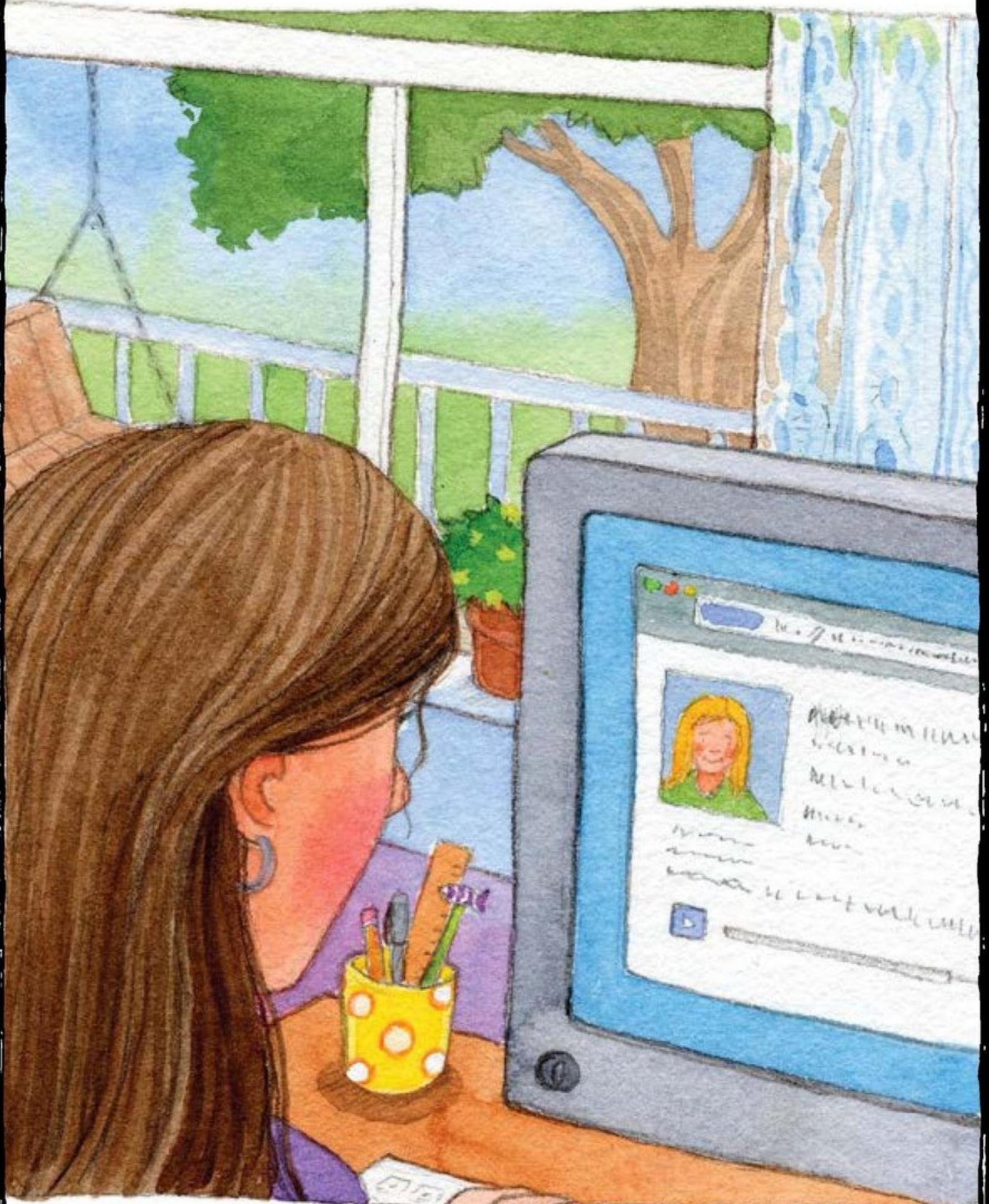


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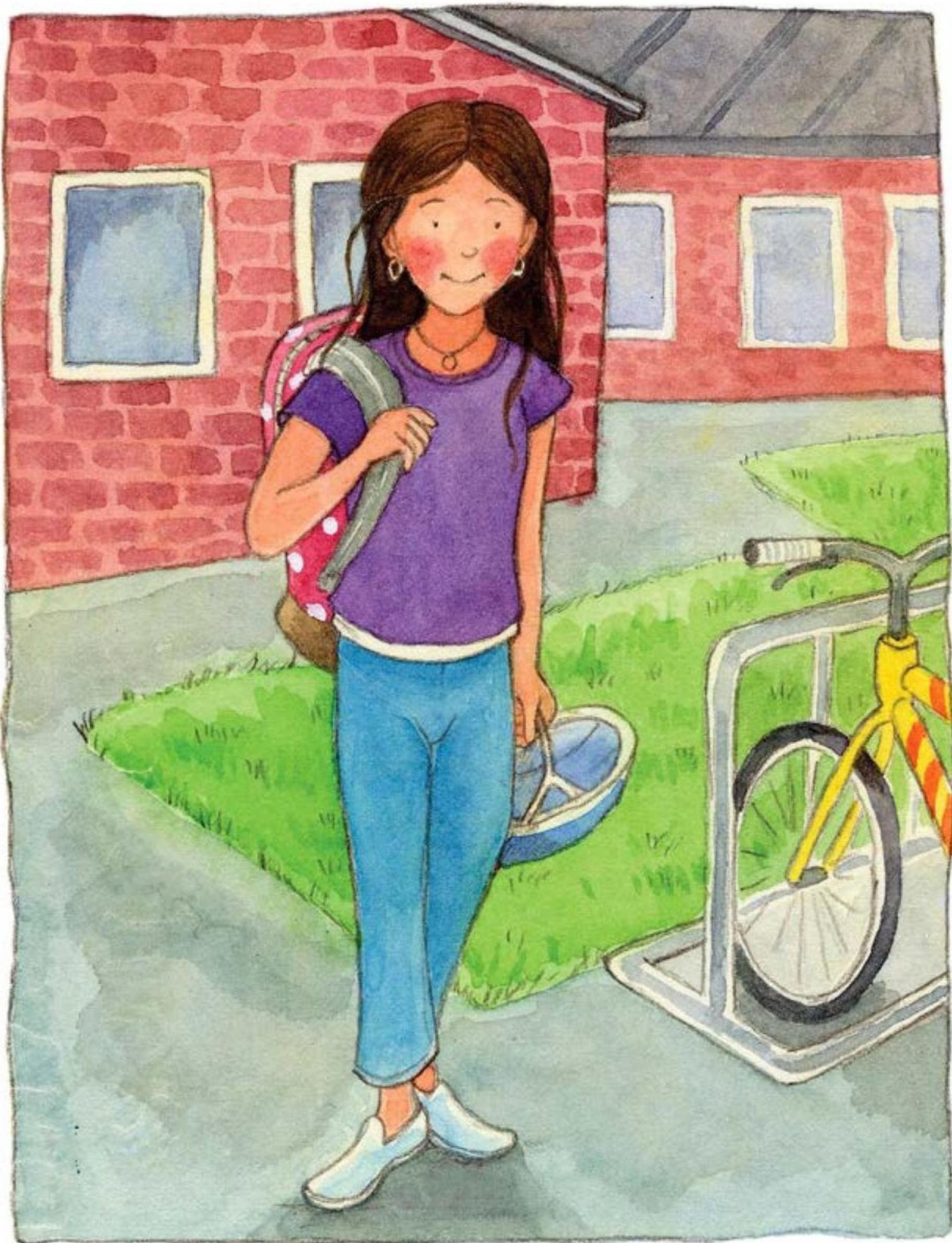


Written by Ned Jensen • Illustrated by Liza Woodruff

# My Secret Internet Friend



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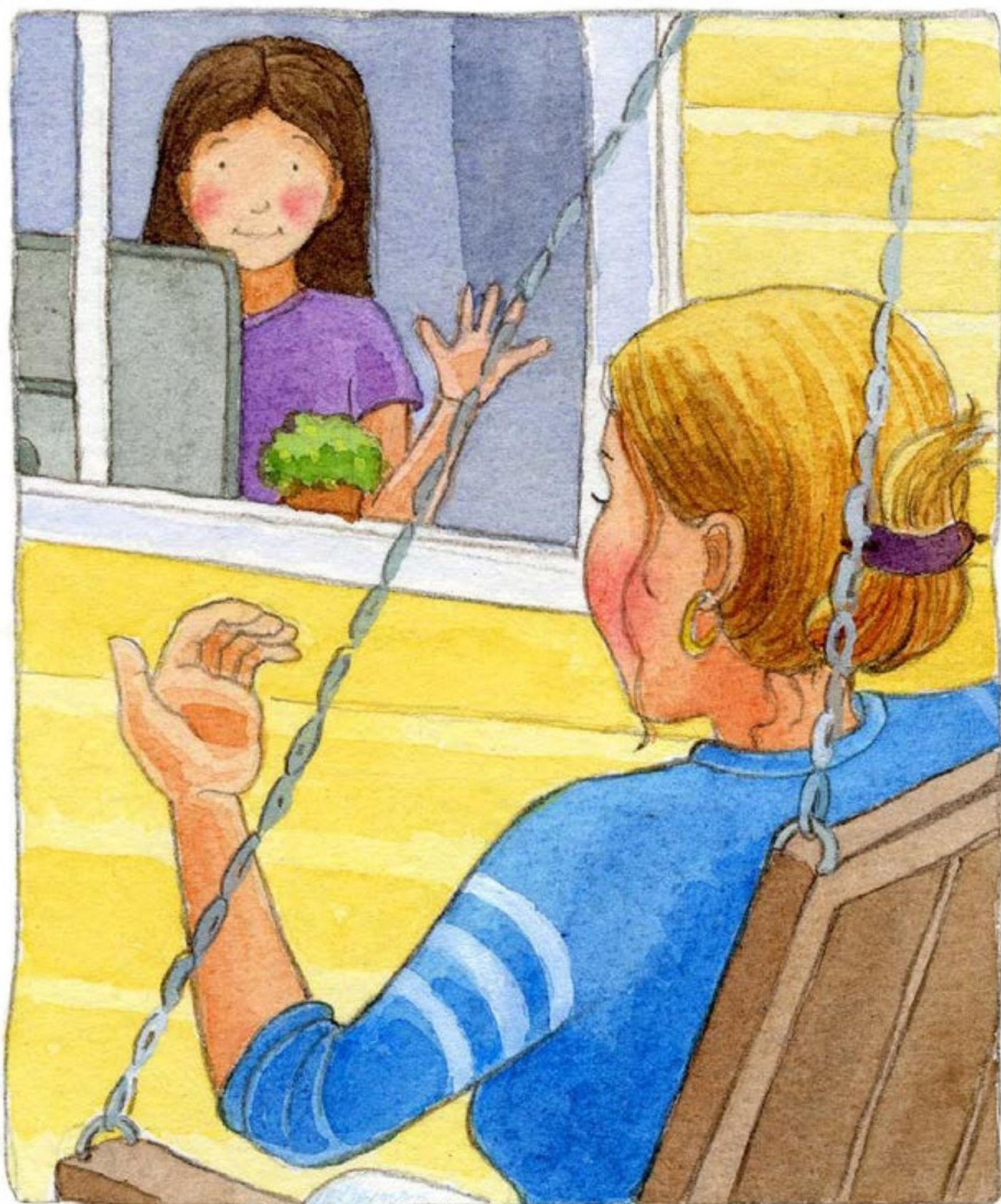


Hi. My name is Sara Simone. I'm twelve years old, and I'm in the sixth grade. I think I'm one of the luckiest girls in the world because I have a computer in my room. But I'm not the only lucky one—most of my friends have computers, too.

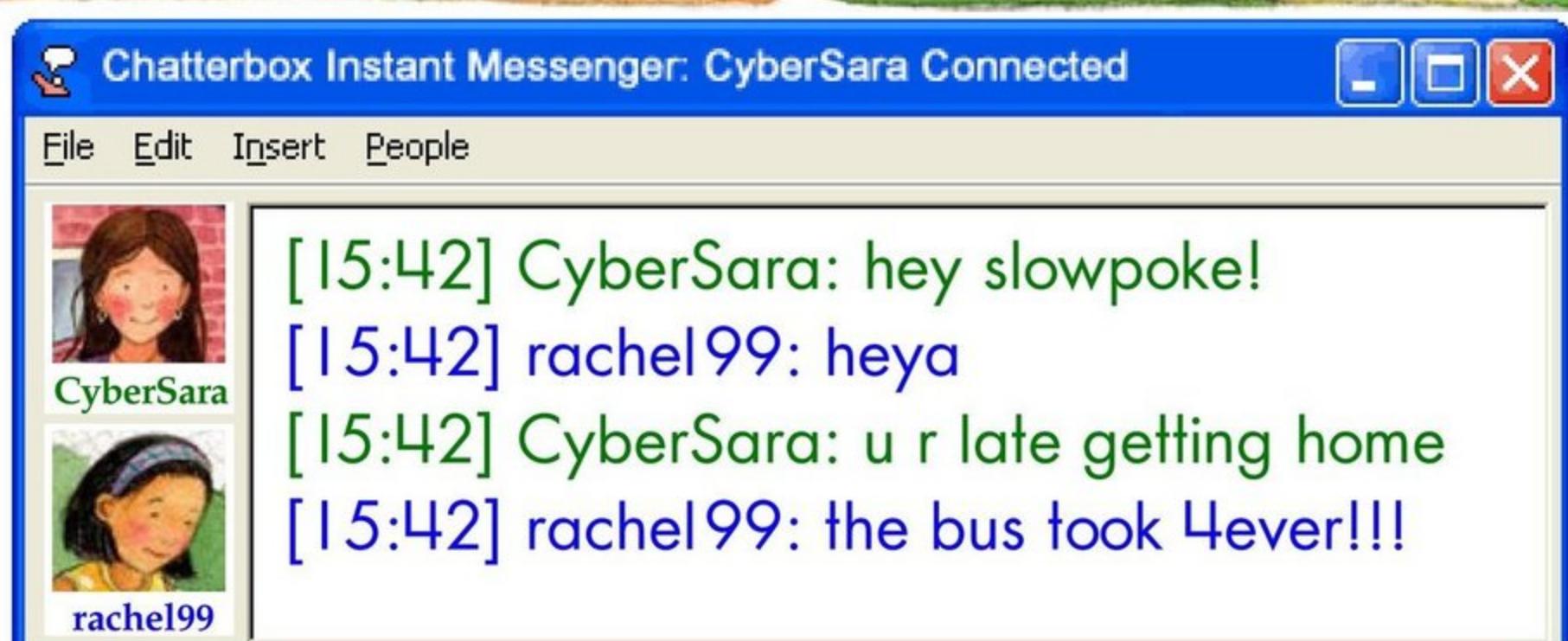


My mom says that I spend way too much time “cooped up” in my room. She also insists that I spend too much time on my computer using the **Internet**. They kind of go together since I wouldn’t spend so much time in my room if it weren’t for my computer. I suppose that’s why some people call me CyberSara.

My mom says I should spend more time playing outside—getting exercise or reading books on the porch, where I can at least breathe some fresh air. She's probably right, but I just love the computer so much. Mom sometimes warns me that I'm becoming **addicted** to the computer.

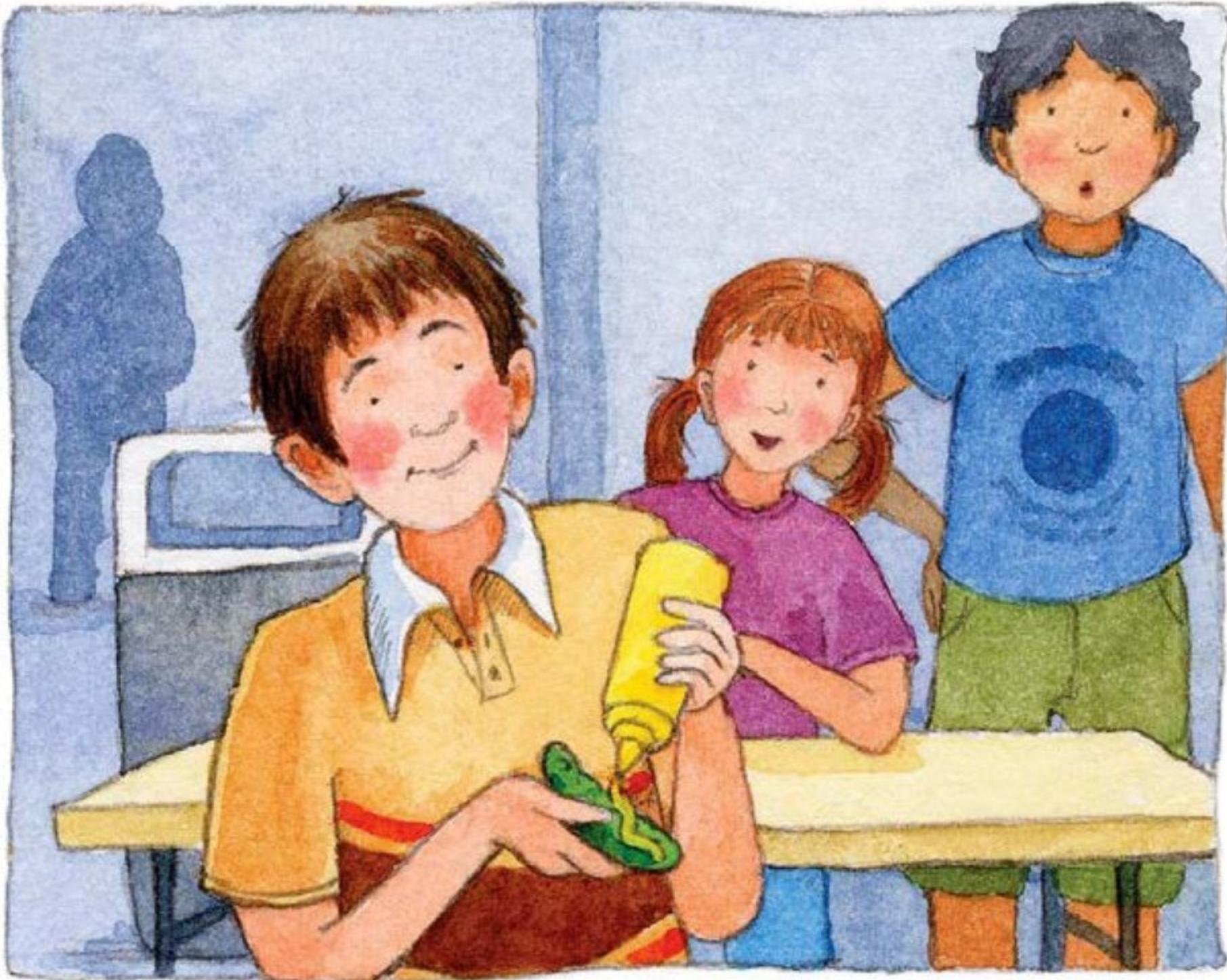


I think being on my computer is more fun than just about anything else I can think of. I can play **interactive** games. I can go on the Internet to find information on almost any subject I want to learn about, and I can even read books online. But what I like most of all is that I can send **instant messages** (IMs) to my friends, and they can IM, text, or email me back. I even have my own FaceKid page.



It might seem kind of silly, but I even gave my computer a name. I call it Clicker. You're probably wondering why I would give it a name like that. Well, think about it. You can click a mouse to do just about anything you want to do on the computer. Since I'm always clicking the mouse, I named my computer Clicker.

Chatting online with my friends is my favorite thing to do. The first thing I do when I get home from school is race to my room and get on my computer. I send an IM to my closest friend, Rachel. She always replies to my messages right away. Sometimes we chat for more than an hour. It's like having a face-to-face conversation with no one else listening. It's our private conversation—just Rachel and me. We IM about what we did at school that day, our homework assignments, our family, our friends, and our pets. Oh yeah, I forgot to tell you that I have a puppy named Charlie and a cat named Boots. Oh, and one other thing—we chat about Freddy Fridley, too. He's a kid in our class.



Freddy is an okay kid, but he does some pretty bizarre things. Like he lets his ice cream melt so he can drink it through a straw. He puts mustard and ketchup on dill pickles before he eats them. Yuck! I think that eating dill pickles by themselves is kind of weird, but putting mustard and ketchup on them is even weirder.

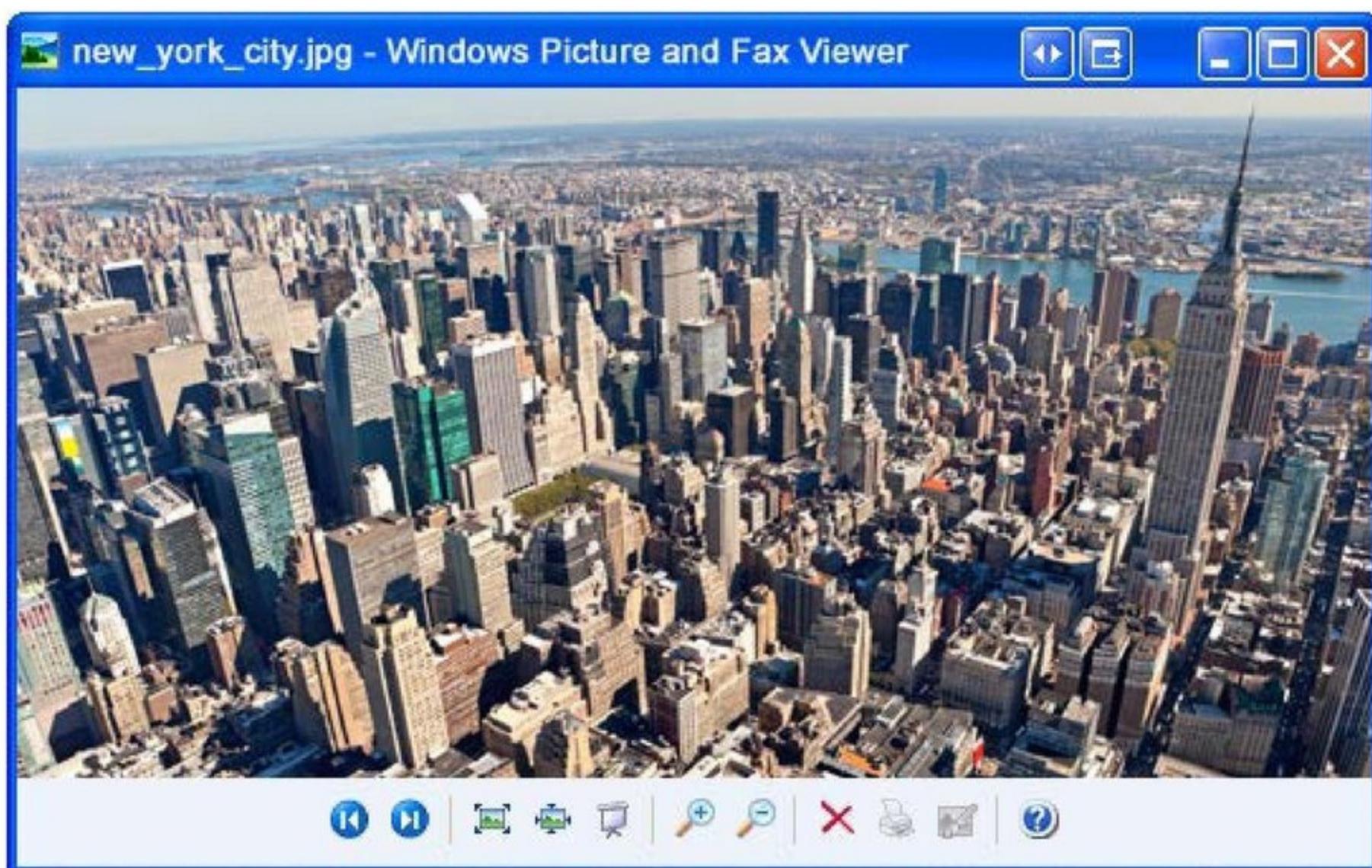


I have lots of other online chat friends. My friends and I sometimes used to IM other kids just to pick on them and poke fun at them. We would say mean things. We would tell them that their clothes were ugly or their hair was a disaster. Or we would say they do stupid things. I guess that's not a very nice thing to do, but I did it because my friends were doing it. I know what you're thinking—that's not a good reason. We've been learning about **cyberbullying** at school and how bad it can make someone feel. The discussions we've had about cyberbullying have made me think differently about exchanging IMs that make fun of other kids.



One day I got an IM from a kid I didn't know. His name was Bradley, and he told me he lived in New York City. He also told me he was twelve. He said he wanted to be my secret friend, and I thought that seemed pretty cool. He asked me what I liked to do besides being on my computer. I found that we both loved to play soccer, even though I don't play as much as I used to. Bradley said he liked watching Saturday morning cartoons and was **obsessed** with playing computer games. I replied, "Hey, guess what? I'm obsessed with playing computer games, too."

Bradley and I chatted and emailed each other every day. We became best friends. He was interesting and seemed kind of smart—in fact, much smarter than the typical twelve-year-old boys I knew. I really liked chatting with him. He told me he really liked me.



Bradley kept telling me New York City was a cool place to live and emailed me amazing pictures of incredibly tall skyscrapers. He asked me where I lived. I told him I live in Tampa, Florida, where it is crazy hot and humid in the summer. He said he always wanted to come to Florida. I emailed him a bunch of pictures, including some with me in them.

**From:** BradleyNYC@FaceKid.net  
**Date:** Tuesday, June 21, 2011 1:50 PM  
**To:** CyberSara@FaceKid.net  
**Subject:** New York pics

▼ Attachments:

 NYC1.jpg	201.1 KB
 manhattan2.jpg	88.05 KB
 new_york_city.jpg	103.1 KB

Hey Sara,

Here are some photos of New York. Maybe someday you will come here and see it for yourself.

Do you have any photos of Tampa? What does your house look like? What about Charlie and Boots?

You should send me some pics.

Your Secret Friend,

Bradley

**From:** CyberSara@FaceKid.net  
**Date:** Tuesday, June 21, 2011 4:10 PM  
**To:** BradleyNYC@FaceKid.net  
**Subject:** Re: New York pics

▼ Attachments:

 monster cat.jpg	19.14 KB
 crazydog.jpg	122.8 KB

Hey Bradley,

Thanks for the pics of New York! I wish I could go there.

I'm sending you photos of me and Boots and Charlie. I'm the one in the photos that isn't a dog or a cat. ;-)

Sara



One day, Bradley told me he had good news. He told me his mom and dad were coming to Florida and he was coming with them. He said we should have a secret meeting when he got here. I thought that seemed cool.

Bradley told me which day he was coming to Tampa. He said we should meet after school and we could go for ice cream with his parents. I wondered if he ate his ice cream through a straw like Freddy Fridley does.

[20:41] CyberSara: u shd snd me a pic of u

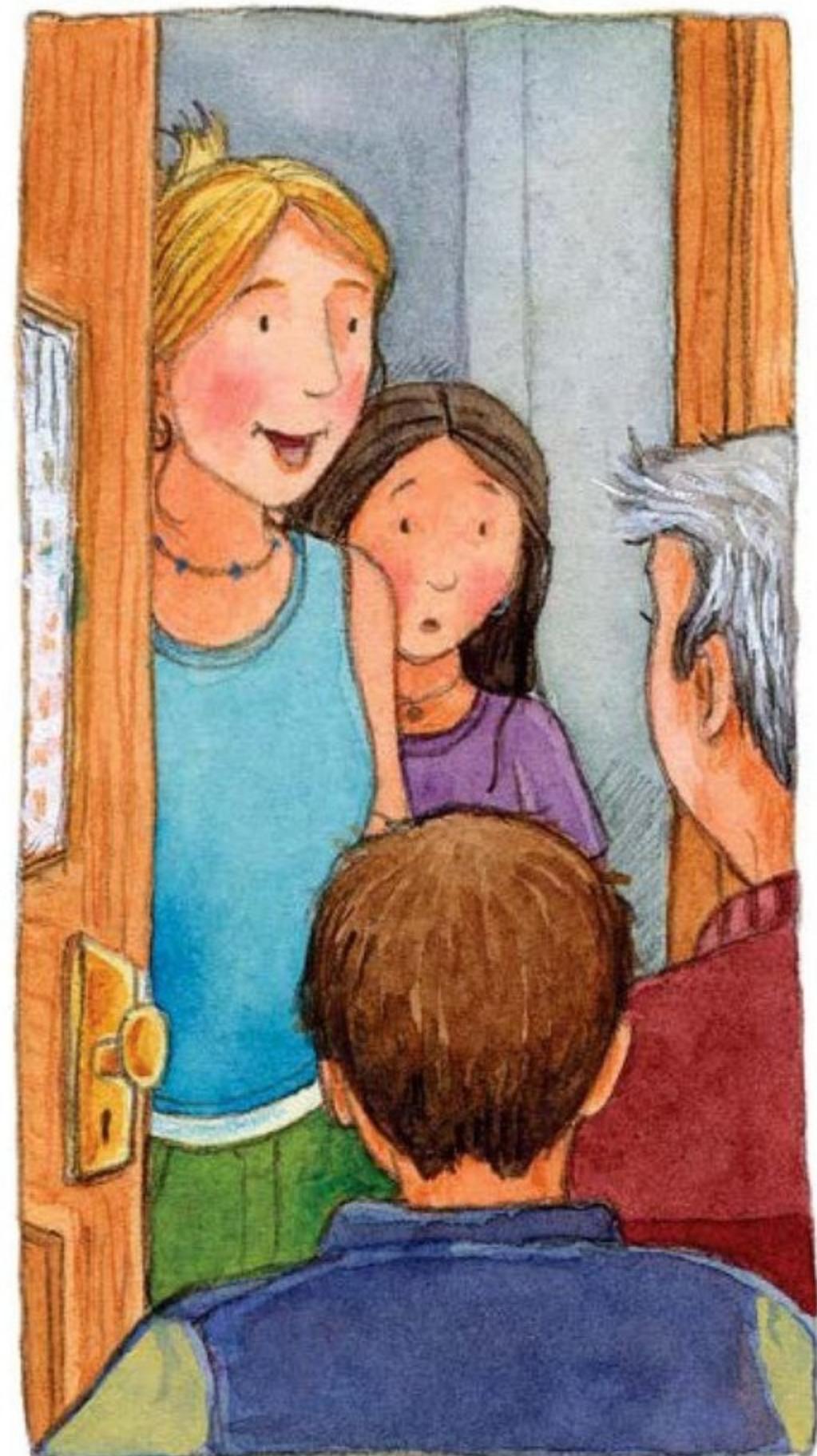
[20:41] BradleyNYC: u will see me soon

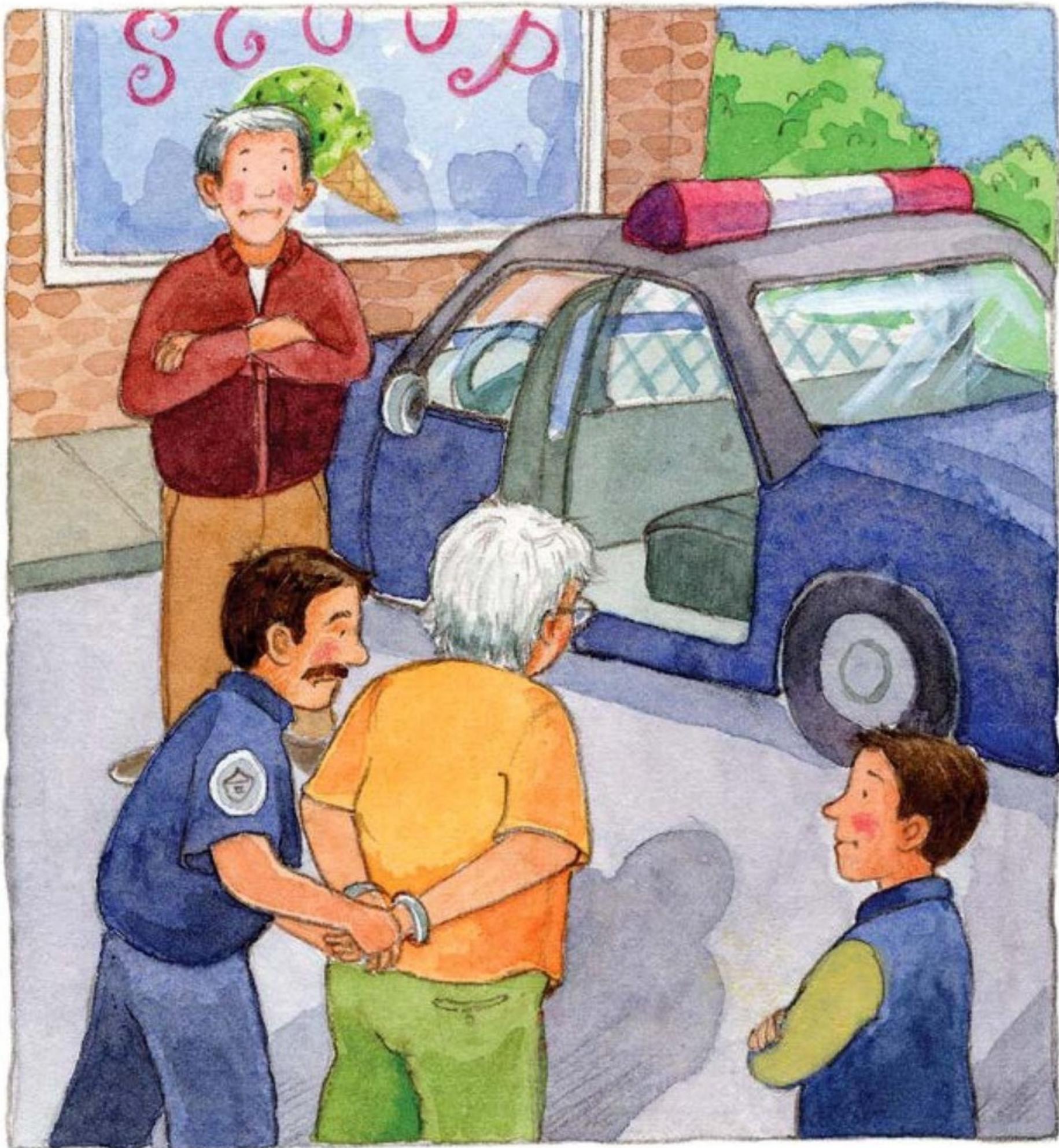
I was excited that I was finally going to meet Bradley after months of chatting online with each other. He refused to send me a picture of himself, saying he didn't want to ruin the surprise. It made me wonder if there was something wrong with him, but he said that everyone in his school thought he was the cutest boy in his class, so I figured he had to be normal.

The next day, I told Mom that I had a new friend I met on the Internet. As soon as I told her, I thought, *Oops!* I forgot that Brad and I were supposed to be secret pals. My mom began annoying me with a ton of questions. Did I mention that my mom is a lawyer? She's really good at questioning people in the courtroom. She gave me a big-time cross-examination just like you see on TV. I eventually told her that Brad was coming to Tampa with his parents and that he and his parents were going to take me for ice cream at the ice cream place near school. That really set her off. She even began shouting, which my mom usually doesn't do.

My mom was obviously very upset. I didn't understand why she would get so upset just because I was going to meet my new friend. She said that I should never, ever IM, text, or email someone I didn't know.

The next thing I knew, my mom had called some of her friends at the police department, and two police officers came to our house. I wondered what the big deal was. No crime had been committed. We were just kids sending messages to each other over the Internet. But the officers began asking a lot of questions and asked to read the **logs** from my chats with Bradley. I told them I didn't save the chat logs, but I showed them the emails we'd sent each other. Then the officers took over sending "my" messages to Bradley.

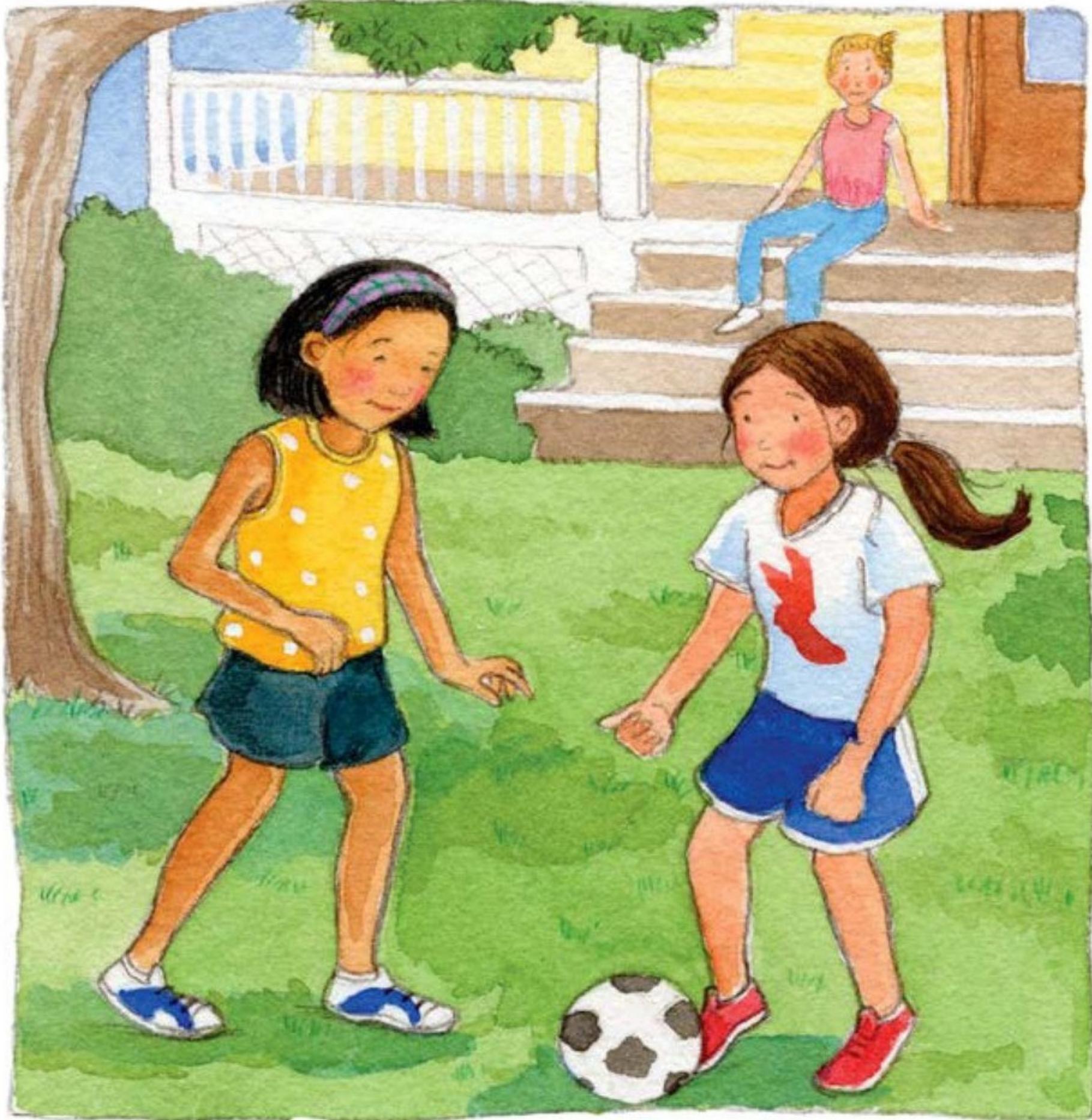




On the afternoon when Bradley and I were going to have ice cream with his parents, Mom picked me up at school. When we went to the ice cream place where Bradley and I were supposed to meet, the police were watching. It turned out that Bradley wasn't a twelve-year-old boy. He was a totally grown-up, creepy man. The police put him in handcuffs and drove him back to the police station.

The police later told my mom that Bradley wasn't even his real name and that he had planned to do something bad. They told us he never really wanted to be my friend; he was just pretending he was my friend to trick me into meeting him alone somewhere. I was lucky that I slipped up and told my mom about my secret friend. I was also glad that my mom blasted me with all those questions and called the police.

I sure learned a lot from this experience. I learned that there is information I shouldn't share with people on the Internet, especially someone I have never met. I also learned that I shouldn't keep secrets from my mom. I know I will stop saying mean things about other kids in my emails and text messages. And, if my mom insists, I will let her read my messages and emails. Mom also said she needed the password to my computer, so I gave it to her. I also agreed to move my computer out of my bedroom and into the living room. Before this stuff with "Bradley" happened, that probably would have made me angry. But now I understand, so I am okay with it.



I'm pretty sure that Clicker and I will still spend plenty of time together. But this experience has made me think more about what my mom says. I think I will even spend more time outdoors playing soccer instead of just hanging out in **cyberspace** with my friends. I can guarantee you that I won't be striking up new online friendships with people I've never met—at least not without telling my mom about them first.

## **Basic Internet Safety Guidelines for Kids**

- If someone online asks to be your “secret friend” or wants you to keep their chat messages or emails secret, tell your parents.
- When online, don’t give out information about yourself such as your full name, age, home address, phone number, the name of your school, or any of your passwords. You should also never send photos of yourself to strangers online.
- Never agree to meet someone in person whom you only “know” online.
- Don’t send bullying, hostile, or inappropriate messages online and don’t respond to such messages if you receive them.
- Don’t try to buy anything that you see online without making sure that it’s okay with your parents first.
- Don’t spend all your free time on the computer. Getting physical exercise and spending time with friends in person are important, too!

## Glossary

<b>addicted</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	physically or psychologically dependent on something (p. 5)
<b>cyberbullying</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	the bullying of a person through the electronic posting of harmful messages about them (p. 9)
<b>cyberspace</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a computer network, especially the Internet (p. 18)
<b>instant messages</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	typed messages exchanged between computer users in real time over the Internet (p. 6)
<b>interactive</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	created to respond to input from a user or involving a connection to other people (p. 6)
<b>Internet</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a global, public computer network (p. 4)
<b>logs</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	records of events (p. 15)
<b>obsessed</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	completely occupied with thinking about something (p. 10)
<b>text</b> ( <i>v.</i> )	to send or receive a short written message by an electronic device such as a cell phone (p. 6)

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