Helping your children choose books they will love

I ♥ reading

Lovereading4kids.co.uk is a book website created for parents and children to make choosing books easy and fun

Opening extract from

# Small Blue Thing

Written by

## S. C. Ransom

Published by

**Nosy Crow Ltd**

**All Text is Copyright © of the Author and/or Illustrator**

Please print off and read at your leisure.

Lovereading4kids.co.uk

# Small Blue Thing

S.C.Ransom



SMALL BLUE THING

Published in the UK in 2011 by Nosy Crow Ltd
Crow's Nest, 11 The Chandlery
50 Westminster Bridge Road
London, SE1 7QY, UK

Registered office: 85 Vincent Square, London, SW1P 2PF, UK
Nosy Crow and associated logos are trademarks and or registered trademarks of
Nosy Crow Ltd

Text copyright © S. C. Ransom, 2010

The right of S. C. Ransom to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted by her under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

All rights reserved.

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, hired out or otherwise circulated in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise) without the prior written permission of Nosy Crow Ltd.

Printed and bound in the UK by Clays Ltd, St. Ives Plc
Typeset by Tiger Media Ltd, Bishops Stortford, Hertfordshire

Papers used by Nosy Crow are made from wood grown in sustainable forests.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, incidents and dialogues are products of the author's imagination or are used fictiously. Any resemblence to actual people, living or dead, events or locales is entirely coincidental.

ISBN: 978 0 85763 000 1

www.nosycrow.com

# Small Blue Thing

**'Small Blue Thing'**

Today I am
A small blue thing
Like a marble
Or an eye

With my knees against my mouth
I am perfectly round
I am watching you

.....

Today I am
A small blue thing
Made of china
Made of glass

I am cool and smooth and curious
I never blink
I am turning in your hand
Turning in your hand
Small blue thing

©1985 Suzanne Vega
Reproduced by kind permission of Michael Hausman Artist Management

For Ellie
and her big brother Jake

# Amulet

The swan was thrashing about at the edge of the water, its huge wings beating the gravel and scattering all the other birds. We watched in horror as it twisted and turned, making loud, ominous hissing noises.

"I can't stand this," I shouted over the din, "I have to see if I can help it. Can you call someone – the police or a vet or whoever? I'm sure it's going to be hurt." I moved towards the bird cautiously.

"Alex, don't be so stupid," cried Grace. "It'll break your arm."

"I have to try," I muttered to myself as I edged down the little beach towards it.

The swan was frantic now, and as I got closer I could see why. The ring on its leg had got caught on a piece of curved wire which was sticking up out of the compacted sand and gravel. I stopped and dropped to a crouch, and tried to appear less threatening. I wasn't sure how to make soothing noises to a distressed swan, but no one could hear me so I had a go.

"There, there," I cooed, "nice swan. I'm not going to hurt you."

It fixed me with a baleful eye, but slowed down a little. I edged closer, keeping a wary eye on the vicious beak and those powerful wings. It suddenly stopped hissing and in the unexpected silence all I could hear was the strange sound of its huge webbed feet scuffing the beach. It held its wings out wide, looking as

threatening as possible. It was doing a good job. At least if I broke my arm now, I reasoned, the exams were all over. We had finished the last one just this morning and our afternoon was supposed to be spent partying. At this point though, only Grace and I were left, the others having long since gone home to get ready for tonight.

I got to within a few feet of the bird when it suddenly decided that I was close enough. With a huge cry it strained up, flapping its wings wide. It was so close that the tips of the feathers brushed across my face. There was a sudden cracking noise, and in a flurry of white it was gone. I fell back in surprise and ended up sitting in the muddy sand.

Where the swan had been were the remains of the identification ring it had worn, next to the wire which had caused all the trouble. In all its thrashing about, the bird had kicked up the ground fairly well, and the wire still hadn't budged.

"Are you OK?" called Grace anxiously, peering at her mobile. "Do you still think I should call someone who knows what they are doing?"

"Not much point now," I grumbled, wiping the muck from the backside of my new jeans. It didn't make much difference. "I'm already filthy, so I'm just going to see if I can fix that wire," I called back.

It was only a little beach, one of several that appeared at really low tide on this part of the Thames at Twickenham. This one was overlooked by the terrace of The White Swan pub. The swans, geese and ducks were a regular feature, always wandering up to the terrace on the lookout for stray chips or a bit of unwanted bun. Usually when I was here it was packed with customers enjoying a pint in the sunshine, but late in the afternoon on this Tuesday in early June it was almost deserted.

Various bits of rubbish appeared on the beach at low tide, and the birds were clearly able to negotiate most of it safely. But I was angry about this particular bit of wire, which had come so close to breaking the poor bird's leg. I reached forward and tugged at it, not really expecting to be able to move it. It was stuck fast. Perhaps I could twist it over so that it was no longer a danger. I searched about for something I could use to bend it with, as my fingers were obviously not up to it.

I found a solid-looking piece of rock and started to hit the wire with it, bending it back down into the gravel. As it started to curve, I suddenly caught a glimpse of a brilliant blue. Curious, I stopped hitting and started trying to clear the gravel from around the wire. Deep in the mud it was wrapped around a small blackened circle of metal, about the size of my palm, with a round, blue stone attached. As the sunlight hit it, the stone sparkled and danced like an opal. I carried on digging. The wire went down and seemed to be wrapped around a large rock. I wasn't going to shift that in a hurry.

The wire was old, though, and this far down in the mud it looked a bit more fragile. I got a good grip on it and started to twist, and soon enough it snapped in two. I lifted the band to get a good look at it.

The stone was beautiful, a deep azure blue with flecks of gold and pinks and reds, all glinting in the sun. I rubbed at the band, shifting some of the ancient filth, and a dull silver colour appeared. Even through the dirt I could see the craftsmanship. Why would someone tie something so stunning to a rock and throw it in the river?

I took it into the Ladies at the pub, and washed it off a bit, trying to dig through all the grime and Thames muck that had

clearly accumulated over some years. I tried to tidy myself up a bit too, but that was plainly hopeless: I was just going to have to go home and get changed. That was going to make me pretty late for the night out in Richmond that we had planned as a celebration.

My mind began to wander as I rubbed the band dry. If I arrived at the film late, I might miss the chance of sitting with Rob. I knew that Ashley was after him too, and she might make a move first. I had to avoid *that* happening.

I continued to rub the band as I thought about the evening ahead. It was gloomy in the Ladies with only a dim light bulb and I couldn't see the detail of the stone. I peered into it, and for a brief second it looked as if the surface of the stone rippled, almost as if it had blinked. I dropped it in surprise, then picked it up again cautiously from the basin. It must have been the light, I decided, as I considered it from every angle and nothing happened. I finished drying it and went back up to the bar to get more drinks. The barman was standing looking bored drying the glasses. He eyed me suspiciously, almost looking as if he was hoping that I would try to order something alcoholic so he could refuse me. He never liked it when we came into his bar, but the terrace more than made up for his attitude.

Although the bar was empty, the beach was getting busier. Two fit looking guys turned up with a couple of kayaks and attempted to launch them. I watched them from the balcony for a minute as they tried to impress Grace, but they really weren't very good. There was a lot of wobbling and swearing, and at one point I was sure that at least one was going to fall in, but eventually they made it and paddled off.

When I got back on the terrace with the long cold glasses, Grace and I examined my find. With the help of a spoon left on

the table, we were able to prise the wire off the band, and get a better look at what it really was. It seemed to be a silver bracelet, set with a large, round blue stone. It looked a bit like an opal, but it was subtly different from the much smaller one my mum had in her jewellery box.

As I examined the stone the flecks of colour inside shimmered in the light, and I opened my mouth to tell Grace about the blinking I had seen earlier, but shut it again. What would I say that wouldn't sound a bit weird? I must have imagined it.

"It must be worth a bit," said Grace, taking the bracelet from me and turning it over in her hands. "I wonder how it ended up in the Thames."

"Well, whoever put it there wasn't expecting it to surface again," I told her. "It was tied on to a really big rock with the wire. Someone must have thrown it in, and from the look of the wire it's been there a while."

Grace peered at the inside of the band. "Of course, it's really too mucky to tell, but I can't see a hallmark. Perhaps it's fake after all," she giggled. "Or maybe a jealous lover threw it into the river, determined to get rid of his rival's gift."

"He might have thrown it in after the rival, or the girl," I mused, imagining a dark, brooding presence. I could almost visualise the scene, watching an angry lover hurling the bracelet and rock into the river. The thought made me shiver.

I took the bracelet back, rubbing it gently and wishing that there was a way to know. There had to be a story and I longed to know what it was. Whose hands had twisted that wire into place, securing it to the rock so tightly?

"Well, it will be interesting to see how it looks when it's all cleaned up," said Grace, interrupting my thoughts. "And speaking

of cleaning up, what are you going to do? You can't come to Richmond looking like that." She gestured at the blackening mud was drying on my jeans. As she mentioned it, I became aware of a bit of a pong. I took a surreptitious sniff; I didn't smell good.

"By the time I get the train home and change and come back, it will be too late to get into the cinema," I realised, looking at my watch and groaning. I wouldn't just be late: I would miss a huge chunk of the film – if they let me in at all. I didn't live that far away, but it was on a very slow branch line and there was only one train an hour.

"Hmm," Grace appraised me with a mischievous eye. "If you want my help, I could fix you up…"

I felt my shoulders slump as I realised that I had finally given Grace the opportunity to play fairy godmother with my clothes. She and I had battled for years over my stubborn view that, out of school, jeans were the only practical things to wear. Grace always looked gorgeous in fabulous vintage finds from the local charity shop, which set off her dark colouring beautifully. I never had the patience. Even my mum had stopped buying me anything other than the most practical of clothes.

"OK," I laughed, admitting defeat. "Do your worst!" I threw the bracelet in my bag, finished my drink and took Grace's arm as we headed on back to the high street.

Unfortunately for me, Twickenham had a huge selection of charity shops, so Grace was able to choose from an eclectic mix of second-hand outfits. She fussed and considered, holding clothes up against me and making sucking noises through her teeth.

"Honestly, Grace, if you don't get a move on it would have been quicker for me to go home," I moaned.

"I think I have it," she announced triumphantly. "We can get

you changed at the station." She paid for the last item and gathered all the bags together. "I'll be glad to get you out of those clothes. Really, the whiff is getting worse."

I could only agree with her. Whatever I had sat in back on the beach now smelt as if it had been dead for some time. Yet again, my thoughts were drawn to the bracelet in my bag, and the vision of that dark presence throwing it in.

"You know," I said as we walked towards the railway and the police station came into view, "I really ought to report that I have found that bracelet. It could be valuable, and I have no idea who is supposed to own stuff found in the river. I don't want to be accused of stealing from the Crown."

"Well, I guess you could," replied Grace dubiously, "but they might just take it off you."

"Maybe. But at least I wouldn't feel guilty. Come on, let's find out."

The police station had seen better days. I walked up the worn steps and took a deep breath, opening the heavy door. Grace followed behind me and went to sit gingerly on the edge of a seat, clearly trying not to look around her too carefully. Everything was nailed to the floor.

The policeman at the enquiry desk looked almost old enough to be my grandfather. He had a huge pile of papers and seemed to be searching through them for something. He ignored me completely as I stood in front of him. Eventually I gave in.

"Hi. I found this in the sand down at the river, and was wondering if I should hand it in." I dropped the bracelet in the drawer underneath the thick glass divider.

He gave a heavy sigh, and finally looked up. He stared at me, then fished the bracelet out on his side. "Do you know how much

paperwork I have to complete to catalogue something found in the river, young lady?" he asked in a bored voice as he dangled the bracelet from his pudgy fingers.

"Um, no, not really," I mumbled, wondering if he really wanted an answer.

"Looks like junk to me," he announced with a decisive tone. "I'd just hang on to it if I were you." He tossed it back in the drawer and slid it over to me.

"Are you sure?" It looked real enough to me, and valuable too.

"Oh yes, we get this sort of stuff all the time. Junk." He looked at me and winked. I took the hint.

"Thank you, officer, sorry for bothering you." I grabbed the bracelet and shoved it back in my bag, grinning at him.

Grace had abandoned the long line of plastic chairs, and was standing by the exit, tapping her foot impatiently. "Come on," she urged. "We won't have time to get you changed before the train comes."

In the Ladies at the station, she positioned herself at the door so no one else could come in, then handed me the bags. It was just as bad as I had imagined, but I had to admit, peering at myself in the grubby mirror, that I looked OK. All but my feet – the very muddy electric blue Converse I had been wearing didn't really go with the floating chiffon dress and cute asymmetric cardigan. Grace looked me up and down with a critical eye.

"Not bad," she appraised. "But the shoes don't work. Luckily I have a secret weapon." She whipped another bag out of her little rucksack and threw it to me. Inside was a pair of sparkly flip-flops which clashed perfectly with the buttons on the cardigan.

"I can't," I protested. "You know I can never keep flip-flops