



My Name Is Not Odessa Yarker

by Marian Engel

Illustrated by Maryann Kovalski

Geraldine Shingle was ten and her brother, Rufus, was nine. People thought they were twins because they were the same size. But they were not twins. Most of the time they did not even like each other.

He thought she was bossy and she thought he was a nuisance. He was always getting into her things. And he particularly wanted a share of the seven hundred and fifty-two jellybeans she had won in a contest at school. But Geraldine wanted to keep the jellybeans.

One Sunday Rufus told his father that he had decided to change his name. He thought the name José would be nice. But that wasn't all he changed the next day at school . . .

Just before recess, there was an announcement on the school intercom. "I would like your attention," said Mr. Bowron, the principal. "Rufus Shingle has an announcement to make."

In her classroom, Geraldine pricked up her ears. She had tried to pry Rufus's new name out of her father, without success. "Hi," said Rufus. "I just wanted to say this: My new name is José— that's J O S E, acute—pronounced Ho-zay. And," (very quickly now) "my sister, the jellybean hog, is now called Odessa Yarker." Click went the switch.

"What?" shouted Geraldine.

"Quiet, Odessa," said her teacher. "Line up for recess, class."

"Bbbut—," said Geraldine. . . .



“I think it’s a very good idea,” said the teacher. “Everyone needs a change every once in a while. I myself was once called Steele. I got married and changed my name to Wood. Now, Odessa, run on out with the others.”

Geraldine couldn’t believe what she had heard. Everyone was already calling her Odessa and not two minutes were up. It was a horrible name. It was the name of the worst baby-sitter they ever had. She was so angry with Rufus.

All the rest of the morning they called her Odessa. All afternoon, too. It made her feel mean, and it made her feel like crying. She told her teacher that she hated the name, and her teacher said mildly: “Is that so, Odessa? I think it’s nice. It’s Russian. There’s a city in Russia called Odessa. You can look it up in the atlas.”

By the time school was out, Geraldine felt awful. She tried to walk home alone, but a gang of Rufus’s friends chased her yelling: “Ya, ya, Ode—ssa.”



She wondered what to do when she went to school the next morning. She thought, Maybe they'll all have forgotten about it and I won't have to do anything. But she wasn't hopeful.

"Hi, Odessa," said Molly at the corner.

"My name is not Odessa Yarker."

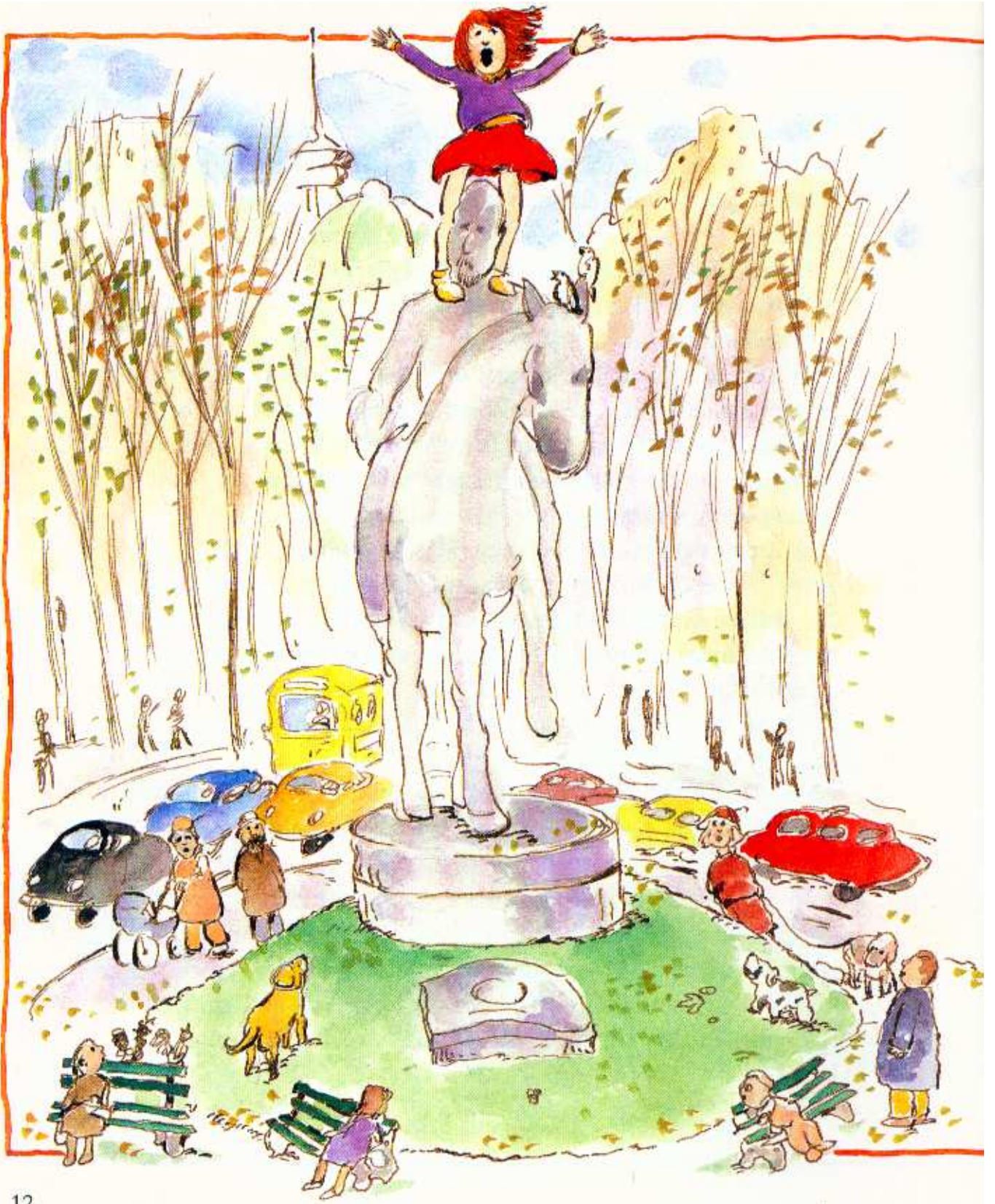
"If you say so, Odessa."

When she got to the school, everyone was there and everyone called her Odessa. When it came time for their spelling test, she even found herself writing Odessa Yarker at the top of the page. I can't stand this, she thought. I'm turning into somebody else in front of my own eyes.

As soon as the test was over, she dropped her pencil and asked if she could leave the room. Then she did something she had never done before: instead of turning left to go to the washroom, she turned right and walked briskly out the school door.

There was no one in the park. She sat down on a bench to collect herself. She tried to think of some way to persuade them all that this was a terrible trick, and that she was not, would not be, and had never been called Odessa Yarker.

In the middle of the park there was a statue of a king on a horse. She had heard of this statue, but she had never seen it before. She went up to the statue and climbed on its plinth. Then she grabbed the horse's metal tail and climbed right up onto its back. She worked her way around into the king's lap.



She climbed up onto his shoulders. Then, balancing herself by grabbing his head, she stood fully upright with her legs astride and yelled and yelled at the world: "MY NAME IS NOT ODESSA YARKER."

Again and again she hollered her message. It made her feel good. The sound zoomed past the university, past the hospitals, out beyond the library, beyond the museums and the greenhouses. Her voice hammered the entire city.

People stared. Squirrels stopped chattering. Birds stopped singing. All the traffic in the circle stopped. Without looking at any of them, Geraldine climbed down the statue and walked quietly home.

She went into her room and sat down at her desk. TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN: she wrote in big clear letters. MY NAME IS NOT ODESSA YARKER. MY DUMB BROTHER MADE THAT NAME UP FOR ME. I DO NOT ACCEPT HIS SUGGESTION. MY NAME IS AND ALWAYS WILL BE GERALDINE SHINGLE.

(Signed) GERALDINE SHINGLE

She went down to her father's office and handed the letter to her father's secretary.

"I'd like six notarized copies, please," she said.

"Yes, Miss Geraldine," he said, and hurried away.

She took the copies to school without stopping for lunch. She did not need lunch. She gave copies of her statement to the principal, the vice-principal, Mrs. Wood, and her best friend, Molly. Then she went to Rufus's room. "I have an important message for my brother, José," she said.

When Rufus came to the door, she handed him the statement and he read it carefully. "You could have left out *dumb*," he said.

"You could have left out Odessa Yarker."

"OK. I'm sorry. I didn't know it would be such a bad idea. Come on down to the principal's office."

The principal sighed, but he let them use the intercom again.

"This is José Shingle. I have an announcement to make," Rufus said. "My sister has brought in a legal notice. Her name is not Odessa Yarker. Her name is Geraldine Shingle, . . . and to prove it, she's bringing seven hundred and fifty-two jellybeans to school. Goodbye."

Geraldine looked at him sourly. He had always been a smart aleck. But at least she had her own name back.

Outside the office, Rufus bent down for a drink at the water fountain. Geraldine looked at him and a crafty smile spread over her face. She shoved his face into the water, which went spurting into his ears.

"*Olé*, José," she said.

