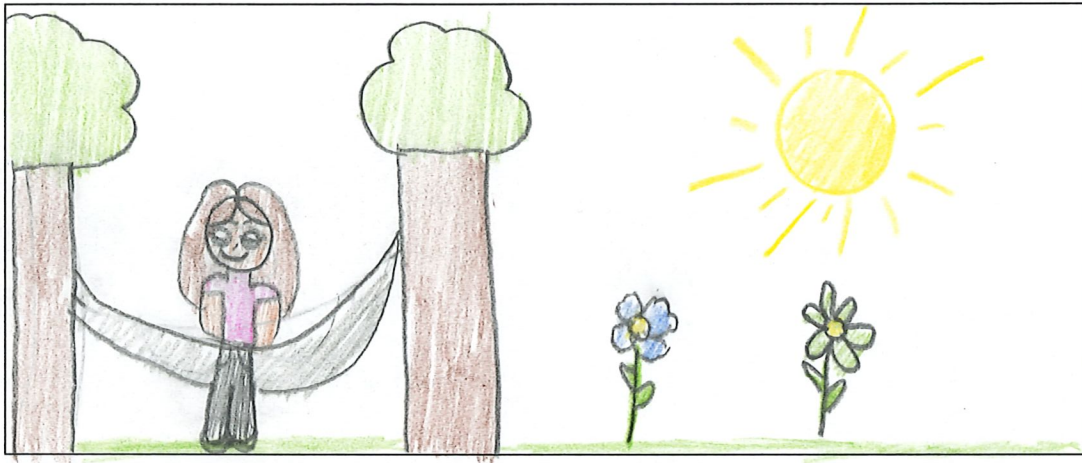


# Summer Before Fifth Grade

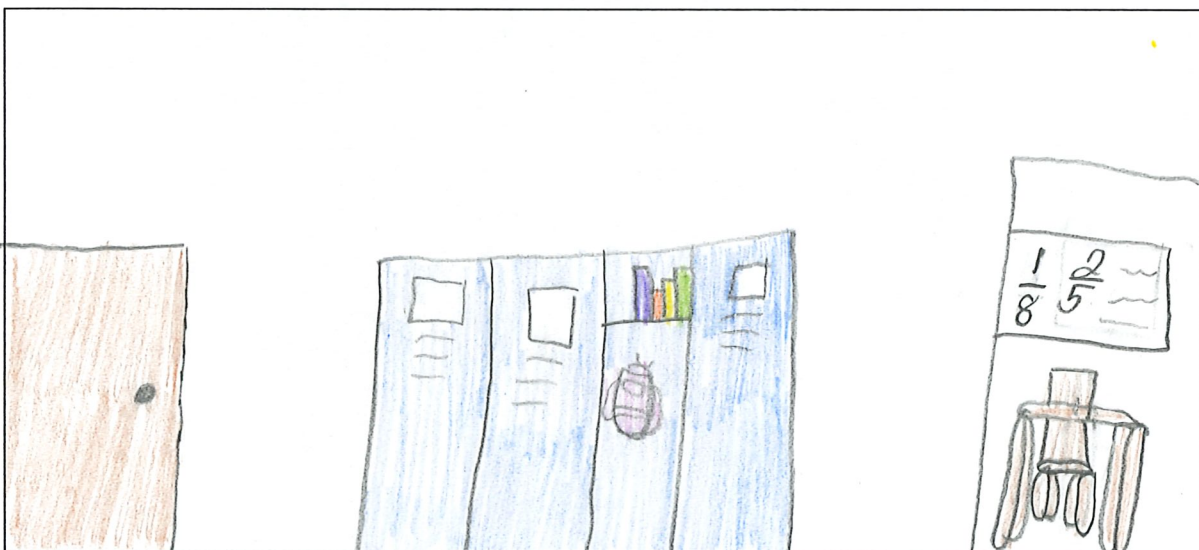
Written and illustrated by Delilah



Penelope sat in the hammock and her bare feet brushing against the warm grass. The summer sun was beginning to set, casting a golden glow over her quiet suburban neighborhood. Usually, she loved summer—swimming, riding rollerblades with her best friend Marie, and staying up late and playing Roblox.



But this year felt different. In just a few weeks, she would be starting fifth grade. The thought made her stomach twist with nervous excitement. Fifth grade wasn't just another year—it was the last year of elementary school. That meant harder classes, a new teacher and the biggest change of all: switching classrooms. No more spending the whole day in one place with the same teacher.



Penelope sighed and pulled her knees up to her chest. "What if I get lost?" she muttered.

"What was that, sweetie?" Her dad sat down next to her, balancing a glass of lemonade in one hand. Penelope hesitated before answering. "I'm just... nervous about fifth grade."

Her dad took a sip of his drink, nodding thoughtfully. "What's on your mind?"



Penelope bit her lip. "Everything. What if I can't find my classes? What if I get a mean teacher? What if my friends are in different homerooms?" Her dad laughed "That's a lot of 'what ifs.'" "Because there's a lot to worry about!" she said, exasperated. "It's a big change."

"I know change can be scary," he said, setting down his lemonade. "But remember when you learned how to ride your rollerblades?" Penelope nodded. That had been a terrifying day. She had fallen hard on the sidewalk, scraping her knee.

She wanted to quit right then and there, but her dad had convinced her to get back up. A few more tries later, she was speeding down the sidewalks, wind in her hair, feeling unstoppable. “You were scared then too,” her dad continued. “But you didn’t let fear stop you. And now, riding a bike feels easy, right?” Penelope nodded her head again, slowly.

“Fifth grade will be the same. At first, it might feel big and unfamiliar, but you’ll get used to it. And before you know it, you’ll be the one showing younger kids how things work.”

Penelope let his words sink in. Maybe he was right. Maybe the first few days would be confusing, but she’d figure it out, just like she always did. “Besides,” he added with a wink, “if you get lost, just find the cafeteria. There’s no way you’ll starve.” Penelope laughed, feeling a little lighter. She wasn’t completely fearless yet, but maybe, just maybe, fifth grade wouldn’t be so scary after all. As the last bit of sun dipped below the horizon, she stretched her legs and hopped off the hammock. Tomorrow, she’d call Marie and see if they could ride their rollerblades to the school to check things out. After all, every adventure started with one small step.

