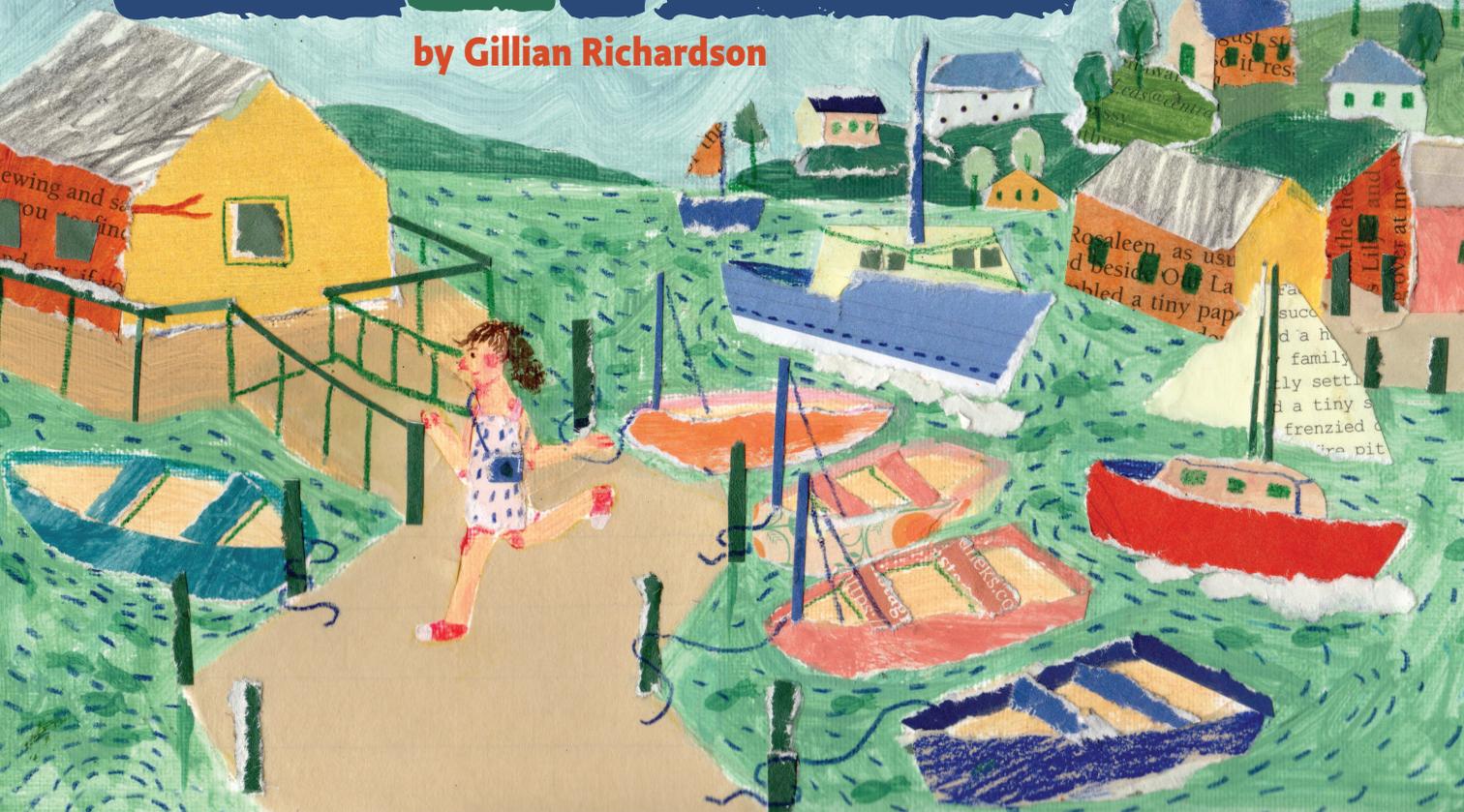


# KATIE AND GULLIVER

by Gillian Richardson



**“KEE-AAH! KEE-AAH! KEE-AAH!”**

“Gulliver’s back!”

Katie’s first morning at Uncle Ralph’s Seaview Resort was always the same. When she and her dad arrived, the huge one-legged gull showed up, too. On the day they left for home, Gulliver disappeared as well.

“It’s amazing,” Uncle Ralph said. “I’d swear that bird knows your holiday plans.”

It had happened every summer . . . until now.

Katie waited for Gulliver’s familiar, raucous wake-up call. Instead, she heard sparrows arguing in the bushes beside the cottages. She heard fishing boats chugging away

in the morning mist. She heard wavelets slurp-slop under the wooden docks. She didn’t hear Gulliver.

“Maybe he missed the ferry,” Dad teased.

“I bet he found a new girlfriend,” said Uncle Ralph.

Katie pushed the cereal around in her bowl. “He’s not coming.”

“Wait and see,” Dad said, and Uncle Ralph agreed.

After breakfast, Katie took her camera and zigzagged down the steps to the sheltered harbor. A rainbow collection of boats bobbed at their moorings. Reflections flashed and frolicked in the sunlight. They made pretty

Illustrated by Sasipan Siriporn

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RAUCOUS MEANS LOUD  
AND ROWDY!





pictures, but not the one she wanted most. The boathouse roof, Gulliver's favored perch, was empty.

Katie waved to Ernest on his houseboat. His shaggy gray hair bounced as he scrubbed the soapy jeans spread on the deck. Shipmate snapped at the bubbles. Her stubby tail wagged when she saw Katie.

"Hi, Ernest. Hi, Shipmate. Seen Gulliver?"

"Welcome back, Katie-girl." Ernest straightened up with a groan. "Nope. No sign of Old Loudmouth yet." He dunked the jeans in a bucket, then flung them over the boom to drip-dry. Shipmate danced away from the droplets that flew her way.

Ernest had given Gulliver his name. The gull's size and his single leg made the bird different. But it was what he began to do that first summer Katie and her dad came that caught everyone's attention.

The way Ernest told it, young Katie lay in her stroller on the floating dock while Uncle Ralph and Dad mended sails nearby. The wake from a speeding boat set the dock, and Katie's stroller, rocking and rolling.

*Kee-aah! Kee-aah! Kee-aah!*

That gull had the loudest cry anyone had ever heard. Dad and Uncle Ralph looked up at once. Dad stuck his foot out just in time to stop the runaway stroller. They kept a closer eye on Katie after that.

Now, Katie loved the gentle motion of the sea under her feet. She'd learned how to keep her balance on a moving dock.

The summer Katie was a toddler, she had to touch everything. Dad made her wear a life

jacket while she played. But if he didn't watch her every minute, she tried to peel starfish off the rocks. Or pick up slimy jellyfish the tide left plastered on the sand.

*Kee-aah! Kee-aah! Kee-aah!*

The gull's cry brought Dad on the run. He stopped Katie as she tried to catch seven mallard ducklings racing for the water. Later, Gulliver's screams warned Ernest that Katie was about to taste a handful of kelp.

Now, Katie tempted the mallard families with chunks of bread. She and Shipmate shared Ernest's special peanut butter cookies while they watched him carve ducklings from driftwood.

The summers passed, and Gulliver continued to call out his alerts as Katie tried new things. When Katie was four she liked to lie on her tummy, head hanging over the edge of the dock, to count the silver-sided minnows in their schools. One day, she hung out too far.

*Kee-aah! Kee-aah! Kee-aah!*

Uncle Ralph dashed from the boathouse and fished Katie out of the water, dripping and draped with seaweed.

The next summer, Ernest taught her a song about rowing a boat, and Uncle Ralph let her sit in the dinghy, pretending to be a sailor. But when she untied the rope that held it to the dock and began to drift away, Gulliver screeched his warning. Another summer Gulliver circled overhead screaming after eight-year-old Katie broke her ankle on kelp-slippery rocks while reaching for driftwood left by a storm.

Now Katie snorkeled in a diving mask to count the minnows and rowed herself across



**GUNWALES** (PRONOUNCED GUNELS) ARE THE UPPER EDGES OF THE SIDES OF A BOAT.



the small inner harbor to pick up Uncle Ralph's mail. She collected driftwood the tide left on the beach. Using the camera she got for her ninth birthday, she took photos of Gulliver, and always a farewell shot of him on their last day at the resort.

"He'll be gone tomorrow," Uncle Ralph would always say as Katie and her Dad packed up to go home. "He won't come back until you do."

This summer, Gulliver hadn't come back at all. Katie did the usual summer-by-the-sea things she'd learned to do. She snorkeled, she rowed, and she explored the tide pools. Every day, camera handy, she scanned the harbor for Gulliver. He wouldn't be hard to spot with his one leg, if he came. But he didn't.

Finally, just one day of the holidays remained. Katie rowed over to collect the mail one last time. The tide was coming in, so on

the way back, she decided it wouldn't hurt to check for Gulliver on a few boathouse roofs along the curving shoreline. She squinted up at each gull that soared above and peered at any that paddled on the sea. Before she knew it, she had rowed out of sight of the harbor. Blue-green waves juggled the dinghy.

Katie didn't see the jagged point of rock that lay in her path. A surprise wave rammed her boat against it. The leak was a trickle, a spurt, then a steady stream. Katie bailed with her hands, then with her sneakers. Water rose above her ankles. She pulled hard on the oars. But the sea pulled harder.

Katie waded to the rocks below the overhanging cliff. She scraped her knees and cut her big toe. By the time she looked back, the boat sat in water up to its gunwales. The oars had disappeared, gone like the summer visitors from the nearby cottages.





UH-OH! UGLY  
APPROACHETH!



IF ONLY HE  
WOULD DISAPPEAR...

She gazed at the oily-looking sea and tried to stop her trembling lips. Uncle Ralph had sent her for the mail. No one knew she'd made a new plan. They probably thought she was safe in the cottage or reading in the hammock. Calico clouds prowled the sky ready to pounce on the sun. Deep purple waves hissed and spat. Katie curled her toes out of reach as she perched on the rocks.

One last sunbeam peeked out between the clouds. Katie tipped her face to catch its warmth and saw a single white feather drifting down. A gull feather? She searched the sky for an answer. Hugging her knees, she closed her eyes to hold in the tears.

*Kee-aah! Kee-aah!*

Katie sat up with a start.

"Katie! Katie!"

"Here I am. Over here!" She stood up in her bright orange life jacket and waved her arms. Soon she was bundled in a warm blanket, snuggled between Dad and Ernest while Uncle Ralph guided the boat. Her tears soaked Shipmate's head.

Dad's arm tightened around her shoulders. "Going off alone without telling us was a bad mistake, Katie. Good thing you knew how to save yourself."

"Lucky we heard Gulliver as we came around the rocks," Uncle Ralph said. "At least . . . it kinda sounded like him. Strange, he was nowhere in sight."

Katie remembered the sunbeam and the feather. "I thought I heard him, too."

Next morning, Katie took a last look at the boathouse roof. Gulls screamed and

swooped over the docks. Gulliver was not with them.

"Go say goodbye to Uncle Ralph and Ernest," Dad said as he piled their bags into the car trunk.

Katie found them at the resort gate. Uncle Ralph had just finished taking the old sign off the post at the entrance. Ernest handed him a new sign that read "Welcome to Gulliver's Lookout." On top was a huge, one-legged gull expertly carved from driftwood.

"We decided it was time for a change around here. Something special. Been working on this for weeks. What do you think, Katie-girl?"

Katie's face lit up with a grin.

"It's a perfect way to remember him, Ernest."

She brushed her fingers over the painted feathers. "He stayed as long as he was needed."

And she snapped one final farewell photo of Gulliver. 

