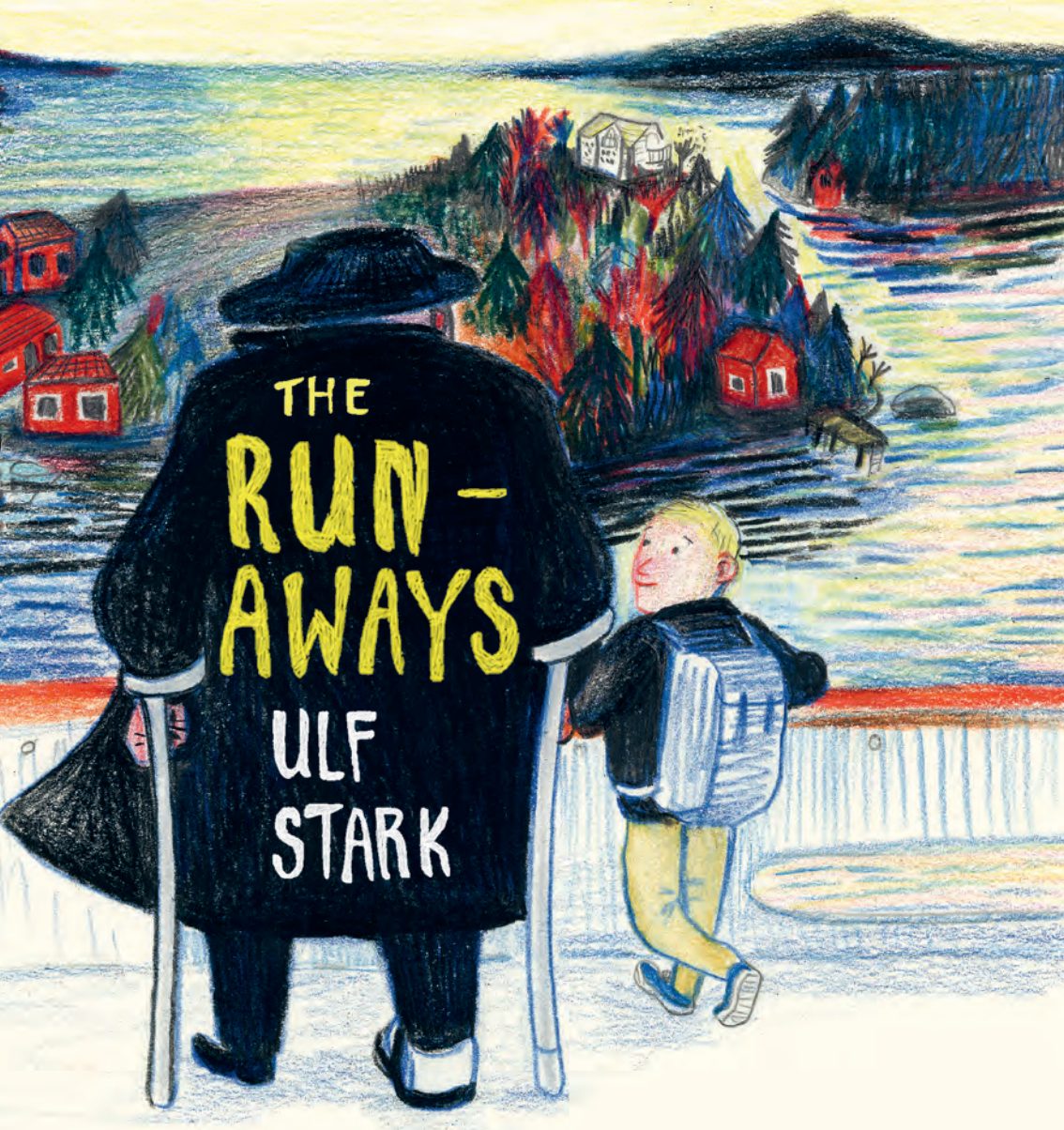


Grandpa didn't like hospital. So together we made a plan...



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THE RUNAWAYS



THE
RUN -
AWAYS

ULF
STARK

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I.

OUTSIDE THE HOSPITAL, maple leaves glowed red and gold. I watched them through the window and thought: It's strange how leaves are brightest the moment before they fall.

"Come and look," I said. "It's really pretty."

"I don't want to look," Grandpa thundered. "I'm not allowed out."

I was visiting him in hospital all by myself. I'd been there lots of times with Dad. So I knew how to get there. First you take the subway. Then you catch a red bus and get off when you see the church on the hill to your left.

It wasn't hard.

Dad didn't often want to go, because Grandpa was difficult. He always had been, but now he was worse than ever. He got angry and shouted. He spat out the pills that could make him nice and calm. And he yelled at the nurses.

"I'm shut in here like an animal!" he shouted. "What do you think I am? An ape?"

His face turned bright red and he swore, so Dad and I had to cover our ears. Dad thought I didn't need any more swear words than the ones I already knew.

I disagreed.

I liked it when Grandpa got angry. It made life a bit more exciting.

But it made Dad tired and sad. He felt awful seeing his strong, fat father lying there getting weaker and thinner. That's why he didn't like going to visit.



“Why can’t he be like other people?” he sighed.

That was on Thursday. Dad came out of the dental surgery, hung his white coat on its special hook and padded around the house winding up the clocks. He always did that on Thursdays. There were nine of them. I followed him around.

“Can’t we take Grandpa out of there?” I asked.

“No,” said my father, winding up the grandfather clock in the dining room.

“Why can’t he live in the old people’s home here? Then we could see him every day.”

We had a rest home next door to our house. On our street there were usually plenty of old people wandering around who didn’t really know where they were. Grandpa could join them. Then he could come over to us for dinner. I could see him as much as I wanted.

“This isn’t Grandpa’s part of town. You know that.”

“Well, he could live with us. He could sleep in my room.”

“I said no,” said Dad. “He can’t walk upstairs. His heart’s too big and weak. And he’s too sick and angry and stubborn and crazy. You know what happened last time.”

“That was just bad luck,” I said.

“Bad luck?” Dad snorted. “He’d just had his broken leg pinned. Then he decides to have a go at lifting a great big rock and it breaks again. You call that bad luck?”

“I like him not being the same as other people,” I said. “Shall we visit him on Saturday?”

“We’ll see,” said Dad.

I knew what that meant. When Saturday came around Dad would say that *unfortunately* he had too much to do.

He sat down in his special armchair, put on his headphones, looked at the ceiling and turned the

music up loud enough to deafen any thoughts he had inside him.

“I’m going on Saturday in any case,” I said. “I like Grandpa. And I don’t want him to be lonely.”

Dad nodded.

He hadn’t heard a word.