


THE HOCKEY JERSEY



By Jael Richardson
with Eva Perron

Illustrations by
Chelsea Charles



To everyone who has ever
dreamed of lacing up skates,
taping up a stick, and finding
their home on the ice.

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On the day of the first hockey game,
snow covers the trees and the road to the
arena in thick, puffy whiteness.



Kareema rushes into the rink,
carrying the bag her neighbour gave her,
the one who taught her to skate
on the pond outside her home,
the one whose jersey hangs on her wall.





Juliette tugs and tightens the straps on her chest guard.
At the end of the bench, Wenona laces her skates,
determined to get them just right, all by herself,
for the very first time.

Inside the changeroom, Camilla pulls
on a brand-new pair of shin pads
and Hana slides on red socks that her brother
brought home from his first year at college.
Sam wiggles on hockey pants, sliding their
fingers over the patch their grandmother
stitched on with careful crooked hands.



The changeroom is full
of noises as the players
prepare for the first
game – zippers opening wide,

bags scraping
across the floor,



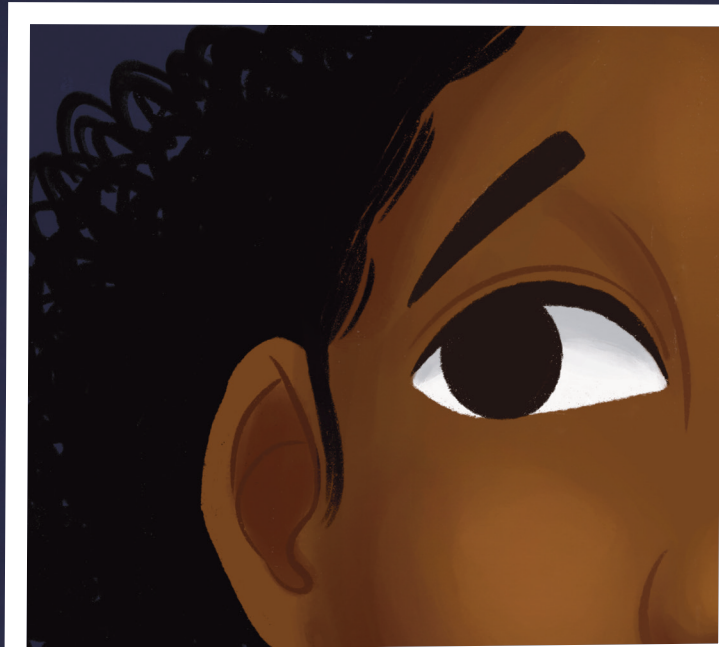
players grunting and twisting
laces and straps while the
Zamboni machine hums
and whirs outside the door.

No one says a word
as they put on their
equipment and glance
around the room,
and Kareema wonders
and worries if everyone
is thinking the same
thing in the cool of
the changeroom,
if everyone feels
awkward
and strange
today.



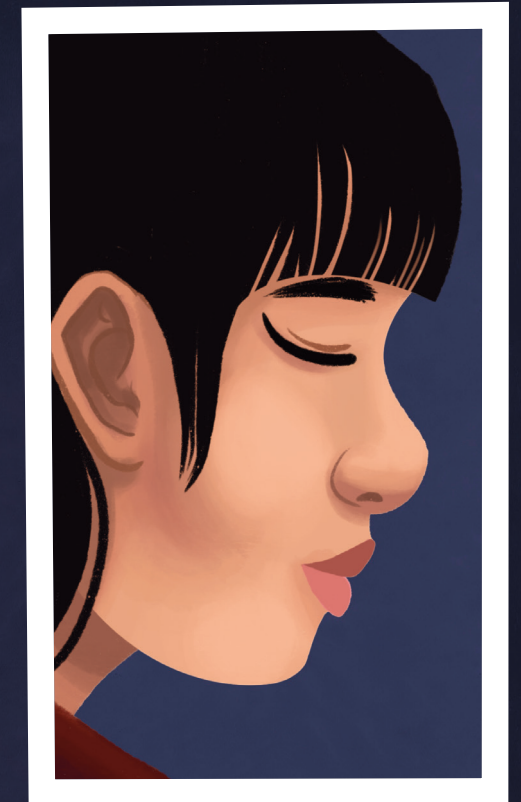
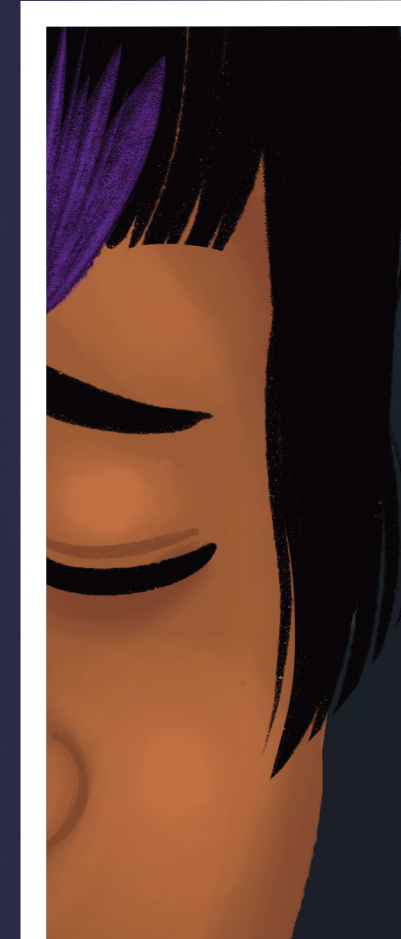
*Is it something about
the way I look?*

Is it my hair,
my hands,
my height?



Is it something you know or
don't know about me?

Or is it something else?



Are you
wondering if
I can skate
or if I can shoot?

Because I can.




When Coach Sylvie swings the door open, when she enters the changeroom with careful steps, the players turn their attention away from one another to the heavy bag she plunks on the floor.



Coach Sylvie crouches down
and thrusts her hand inside the bag,
pulling out brand-new jerseys – brilliant red,
deep black,
and bright white –
just like the kind Kareema's neighbour once wore.





And all at once,
as they stare at their new uniforms,

something magical begins to happen.





They all
begin to talk.

It starts with low
murmurs that
bubble and grow
louder and louder



until the changeroom is
full of voices talking and
laughing as they stretch
their arms into the fabric,
helping whoever they can.





And when they are all dressed
in their new hockey jerseys,
when the helmets and
gloves are on as well,
Kareema feels something different
about herself and her teammates,
something she can't quite explain
as they head towards the ice.

In the bleachers,
the players see friends
and family dressed in
red, black, and white.

Camilla's sister stands
Hana's brother points
Juliette's moms wave
and Sam's father claps.

And when Wenona's
aunties cheer,

everyone shouts,

including Kareema's
neighbour who stands in the
bleachers wearing his own
jersey, the same number
Kareema wears now.



“Go, Kareema,” he yells, as she skates around the rink, and everyone smiles. “Looks like you have a fan,” Coach Sylvie says, and Kareema nods proudly as her neighbour sits down with her family and with all of the fans.



When the players finally gather
for the first game of the season,
they surround Coach Sylvie and
tap their sticks against the ice.





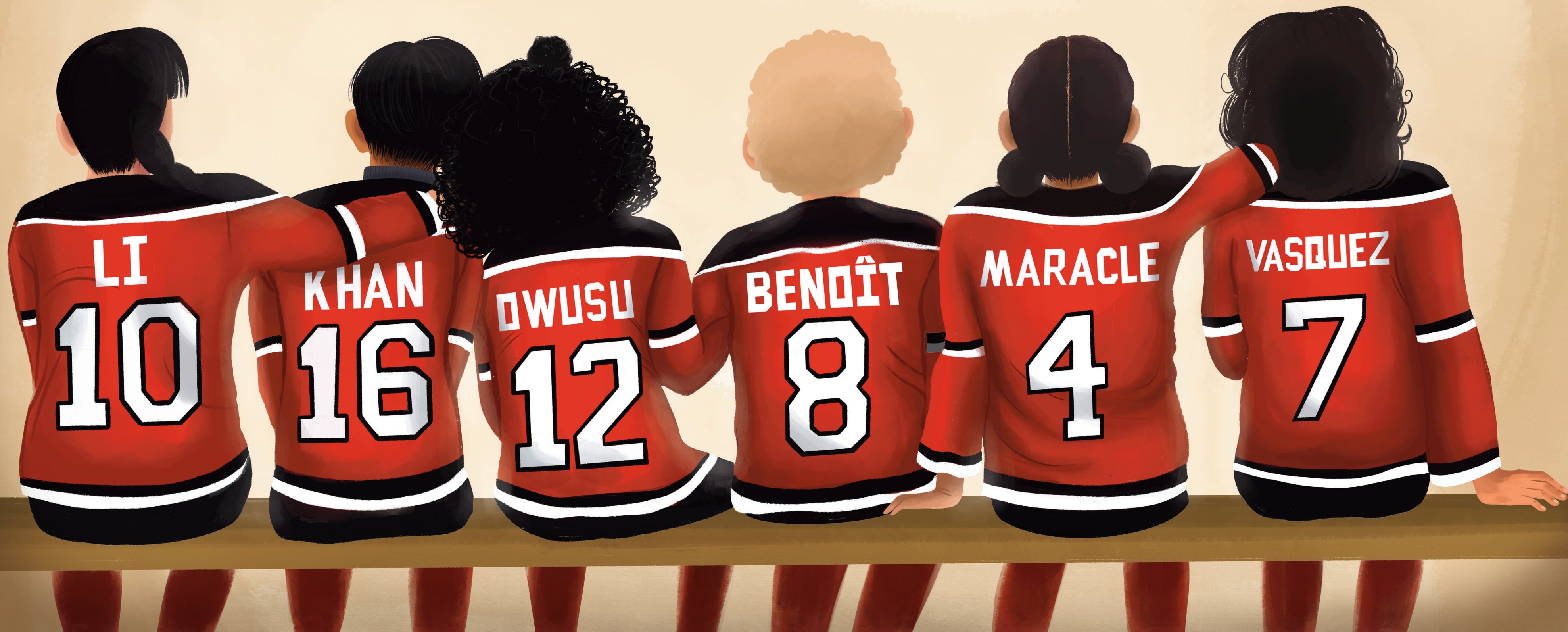
And as the sound of the
rumbling rhythm rises,

Kareema feels something
big and large growing
inside her as she looks at
her jersey
her neighbour
her family
her coach
and her new teammates.

This is more than just a game,
as all of the people in red, black,
and white smile and cheer loudly,
as the players huddle closer.

*This is a whole new
kind of family.*







Jael Richardson is the author of *The Stone Thrower: A Daughter's Lesson, a Father's Life* which was adapted into a children's book in 2016. Her debut novel, *Gutter Child*, was an instant bestseller and a finalist for the 2021 Amazon First Novel Award. Her most recent children's book, *Because You Are*, was released August 2022. Richardson holds an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of Guelph and lives in Brampton, Ontario where she founded and serves as the Executive Director for the Festival of Literary Diversity (FOLD).



Chelsea Charles is an illustrator who resides in Brampton, Ontario, and has received her BAA in Illustration at Sheridan College. She creates her illustrations through a combination of digital and traditional mediums. Her dream job is to illustrate children's books. She's built a career from illustrating everything from sports stars and actors, to political concepts. In her spare time, she enjoys listening to music, being a nuisance to her cat Charcoal and dog Stokley, and daydreams about travelling to Japan.

The Hockey Jersey was commissioned as part of Scotiabank's *hockey for all* initiative and our mission to make hockey more diverse, inclusive, and accessible. We want all children to see a place for themselves in hockey and to feel welcome, safe, and included in the game. The story of Kareema and her teammates was made to inspire Canadians from all walks of life - to feel like they have a place in our national game.

It's our hope that *The Hockey Jersey* will inspire the next generation of hockey players and fans. Learn more about the work Scotiabank is doing and find resources for continued learning at **scotiabank.com/hockeyforall**

Scotiabank



This book belongs to:



*Write your name and number
on the jersey to join the team.*

The Hockey Jersey

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