

Stone Soup

The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists



Fall by Kiera Zhang

FREE

Xexilya, a girl who can't speak, forms an unusual bond with a mountain cat

SEA CREATURE

A mysterious jellyfish haunts Judy's dreams

Plus: A Review of Margi Preus's *Heart of Samurai*

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Editor's Note

In the classic book *Frankenstein*, the monster isn't actually named Frankenstein. Frankenstein is the *doctor*; the monster is never given a name. Throughout the novel, he's alternately "the monster," "the creature," or, simply, "it." But what is a *creature*, exactly? The word (which, like most words, came to us through Latin), means "a thing created," but we tend to use it to refer solely to animals—even though us humans are also created, by our parents and perhaps by a greater being beyond them.

In this issue, I found myself collecting stories, poems, and images about *creatures*—birds, butterflies, mountain cats, and jellyfish. And, in the process, I realized that we seem to turn to animals in our deepest, darkest moments, when we are contemplating the loss of someone we loved very much or wondering what our purpose is. This is an issue to match the season, with its short days and long, black nights.

— Emma Wood

ON THE COVER Keira Zhang is eight-years-old from Los Altos, CA.



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Submissions

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Butterfly

By Amy Zhou

Illustrated by Moneerah Saoudy



Amy Zhou, 11
Skillman, NJ



Moneerah Saoudy, 10
Eden Prairie, MN

WEIRDLY, I FIND Butterflies very interesting. Butterflies are quite beautiful and elegant. Maybe I like them because they were the first things I could draw besides shapes. Also it's because my aunt taught me how to release a butterfly. But butterflies are bugs, and I hate bugs.

During summer break, I went to China and stayed at my aunt's apartment for about a week. I learned that my aunt loved bugs and mainly butterflies. She took me outside one day to find butterfly eggs. I remember she said, "Every egg brings new life into the world and no life should be wasted." These words were inspiring.

I went to sleep gazing out the window at the shining spiderwebs that seemed to have jewels on them. I heard Pidian, my aunt's dog coming. Pidian is old and always stares at me with a questioning expression. She gazes out at the sky with me also thinking silently. I wonder if dogs have feelings and thoughts inside. Maybe bugs do too.

I observed her Butterflies and cocoons and caterpillars daily. The caterpillars were all different. Each with a unique marking. As I watched them more, I learned to like them more. I started to like them more and more.

"Do bugs have feelings?" I asked my aunt.

"Well, if they have brains I suppose that they have feelings," she responded.

"Why do you help them?" I asked.

"Well not all people are helpful, but small things help the



Butterflies

world to be a better place you know,” said my aunt.

The next day, my aunt took me to find more eggs and caterpillars. We finally found one which was green and sparkly. Suddenly, a downpour of water from the gutter hit the tiny thing. My aunt brought it in, hoping it would live.

The next day, the caterpillar was no more. Overnight it had turned into a beautiful cocoon, leaf green with golden

sparkles. It hung on a branch silently. It is waiting to go into the next part of its life. I wonder what it’s thinking about.


Pidian trots in and sits next to me for a while. It too is watching the golden spotted cocoon. It trots under my aunt’s bed, tired of watching and observing. One of my aunt’s butterflies is golden. Like an angel. That one, I can tell, is very happy to have wings and a meaning in life to someday have its own babies and for

them to live on.

Then, finally, after one week, something happened. My cocoon had started to move. Slowly, like waking up from a deep slumber, was a butterfly. Its wings were magnificent. They were sapphire blue with pitch black edgings, but it wasn't free just yet. It couldn't fly just yet.

When the sun was directly above our heads, we set it free. I stuck my hand in, and it backed away as if it wasn't sure if it wanted to leave. Finally, it cautiously walked on my hand, and I lifted it out of

the box. It fluttered in the sunshine and caught a breeze to a new kind of life. I could feel myself glowing with happiness inside, and as I went inside I was sure that there was a smile on my face. Because today I learned that everything has a meaning in life.

Sometimes Pidian falls and gets up or gets into some sort of trouble, but I always help it, just as I would for any other being. I know that Pidian remembers the butterfly and knows that it too, has come to this world with a purpose. 

Creatures

By **Owen Sessine**

Soon, creatures will wake up.
Soon creatures will go to sleep.
Some will not wake up.



Owen Sessine, 10
Guilford, CT

Free

By **Tiffanie Goh**

Illustrated by **Emma Huang**



Tiffanie Goh, 11
Singapore



Emma Huang, 10
Hunts Point, WA

I STOOD ON THE TOP of the tall mountain, relishing every minute, every second, every moment. The cool breeze against my face, the wind toying with my umber coloured hair and the warm glow of the sun warming my skin... When I was surrounded by nature, by trees, flowers, valleys, rivers, and the forest teeming with life; when I was far away from the arguments between my parents, the furniture being thrown around, and the stress of my life, then I truly felt free.

I sat down. I sat for a long, long time, watching the sun climb slowly up into the sky, its warm glow radiating onto the earth. A rock wren landed beside me, cocking its head. I smiled, watching as it hopped back and forth before spreading its wings and flying off. I sighed. I wished I could be free like a bird, free of worry.

I was a mute; I could not speak. However, I went to a normal neighbourhood school, where schoolmates left me alone, ignored me like I did not exist. I didn't mind, I preferred to have my own time anyway. I would sit patiently by the river in the school garden, my hands on my lap. My observant eyes and patience caught movements commonly unnoticed. I saw the sparrows collecting twigs and leaves for their nests, leaves falling from trees, squirrels storing nuts for the winter and ants working hard to build homes, bit by bit, one step at the time.

Sensing how long I had stayed on the mountain, I looked at my watch, broken from my chain of thoughts. It was getting late and I had to head home for breakfast. Reluctantly, I

stood up, enjoying the magnificent scenery for a while longer before carefully making my way down.

I cautiously stepped on the rocks, slippery on the surface by the melted snow in the morning warmth. Spring was approaching. After walking downwards a few steps, I paused and squatted down by the stream near me and took a drink of water. The cool, clear water felt good as it ran down my throat. After the few mouthfuls of fresh water, I continued my progress down the rocky mountain. As I reached the valley, I could see my house ahead. It was a broken down building with an untended garden filled with weeds, and a hole in the roof where rain could sleep in.

I took off my shoes and held them in my hands, walking barefooted in the soft grass. The grass pricked my feet, but yet it was soft, fuzzy and comforting.

As I walked on, I thought I heard a rustle in the grass. I paused for a moment. There was no sound for a while, then the rustling resumed. Silently, I edged closer to the sound. Before I could edge any closer, I heard a shrill squeal and an Andean mountain cat came into view, dashing across the grass. It clutched a small bundle in its jaws, running with a slight limp in my direction. Upon closer inspection, I realised that it was bleeding on its hind leg. It was chased by a wolf with shaggy grey fur, almost close enough to deliver another bite. I looked around frantically for something to throw at the wolf, but couldn't find anything. The wolf was gaining on the cat really fast.

Then I had an idea. I reached into my backpack and drew out my purse. It contained tools I would need for survival if I ever needed them when I went out for an adventure in the wild. The purse was hard, but not too hard to hurt the wolf. Clutching it in my hands, I waited for a moment for a good aim and flung the purse at the wolf with all the strength I could muster.

The purse hit the wolf's skull, dropping onto the ground. The wolf whimpered and paused for a while, giving the mountain cat the time to run off. Realizing who had thrown the object, it spun around and advanced towards me. Slowly, I backed off and ran home as fast as my legs could carry me, slamming the front door behind me when I reached the broken-down building. It was then it dawned upon me that I had forgotten to retrieve my purse back.

From the sofa, Dad glared at me. "You're late," he snapped. "Breakfast is on the table, turning cold." I trooped into the kitchen, retrieving the packet from the kitchen table before walking out of the back door. I wondered if I could find my purse-and the cat.

When I reached the field, the same spot where I last saw the cat, I sat down and munched on the sandwich. After a long while, I saw the grass part and the same mountain cat streaked past me. Curious, I followed the cat to see where it was going. I tailed the cat until it reached an overhanging rock. Inside lay an adorable baby Andean mountain cat. I looked at the older cat with big, grey eyes

and mewed ever so softly. The cat picked up the kitten tenderly and dashed off. I followed the mountain cat. It didn't seem to mind.

The cat disappeared into a bush in the field. I peeked in and saw a litter of five kittens, all huddled together and mewling. I was surprised to realise that beside the litter lay my purse!

The mountain cat picked up the purse tenderly in its jaws and handed it to me. *Here, this belongs to you, thanks for saving my life.* I stared at the cat, baffled. It seemed like it was talking to me, like I could hear its voice in my head. *Indeed, I am talking to you.* I attempted talking back to the cat. *Thanks?* I tried uncertainly. *You're welcome,* the cat's reply sounded like a purr. Happy with my new discovery, I sat beside the family of six as I continued eating the sandwich, sharing some meat with the mountain cat and its litter.

When I noticed that the mountain cat was still limping, I helped it with its leg and found out that the cut on its leg was not serious. It would mend on its own. The cat purred and thanked me again. Touched, I smiled.

When I finished my breakfast, half of it given to the cats, I played with the kittens in the bush which was quite large. One of the kittens was acting oddly. It didn't seem to be looking directly at me. Its eyes were distant and empty. Then I realised that it was blind, just like I was mute. It became my favourite.

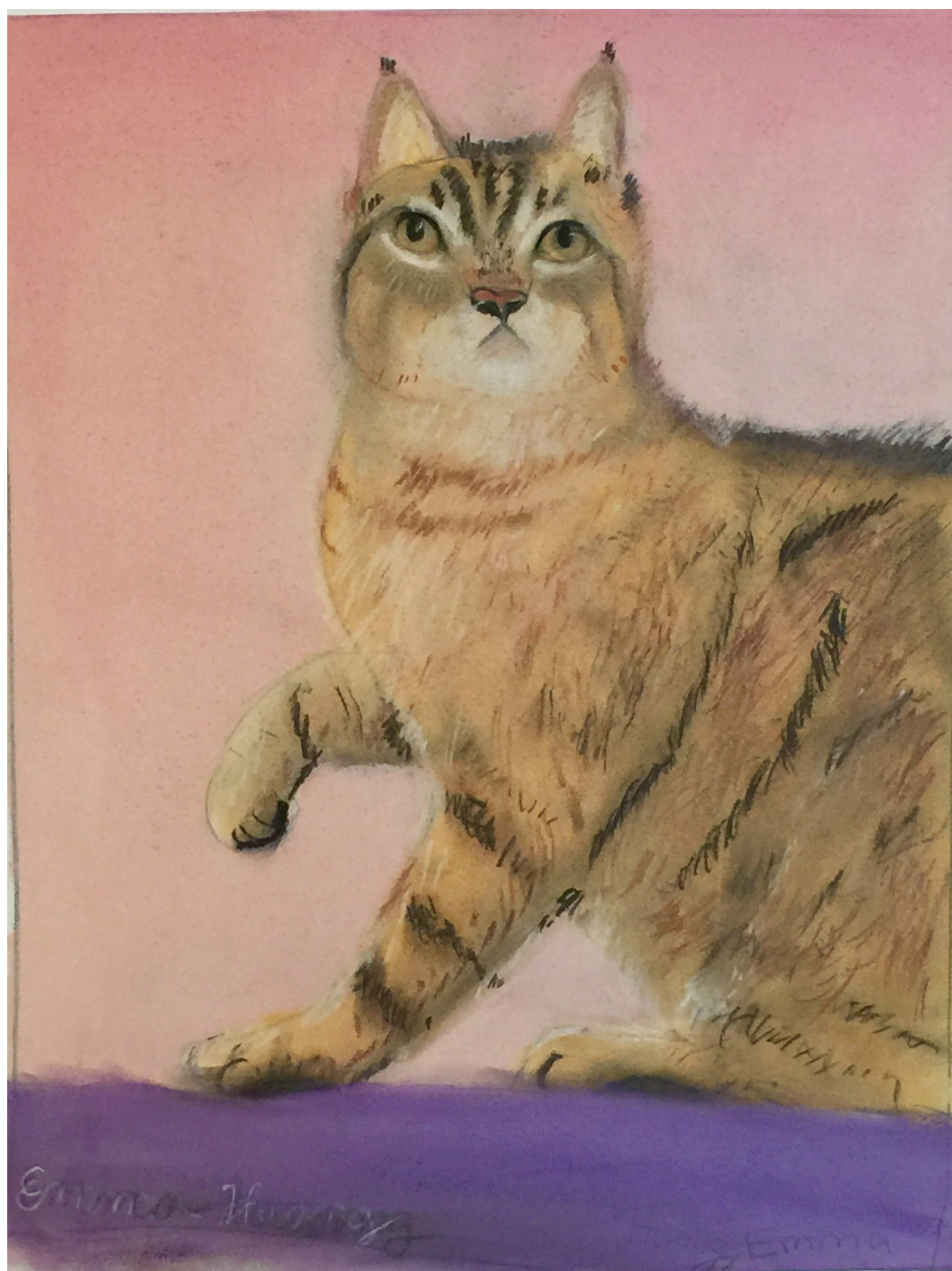
I didn't know it was that late until I looked at my watch. Quickly, I said goodbye and slipped out of the bush, dashing

home. Once again, my father reprimanded me for being late. Why did he care anyway? I thought he hated me. He had only wanted a son after all, and the fact that I was mute only made him hate me even more. He made sure he made that obvious, talking about it often loudly in front of me. Things were no different for Mum.

I walked up the stairs and entered my bedroom, sitting beside the window, scribbling in my diary. It started to rain and thunder, and I was worried for the cats and their pathetic home under the bush. They might get soaked.

I looked at the fields, pressing my face onto the closed window. The surface felt cold on my face. Outside, I could hear my parents arguing. Again. I cringed as I heard a smash. There went Mom's vase. An incredibly loud rip. And Dad's favourite sweater. Mom must have retaliated.

I could not escape the shouts and the noises. There was no way I could go out in the rain. As I continued to stare out at the empty fields, a sudden movement in the trees startled me. A grey figure leaped onto the windowsill, and I was surprised to realise that it was the mountain cat! It mewed and batted at the window, crying to be let in. I unlatched the window and the cat leaped in, dripping wet. It had one of its kittens in its jaws. It put the kitten on my bed before calling, *help me, my kittens are getting wet in the rain.* It then dove out into the rain again, climbing nimbly down the tree. I grabbed my raincoat and a towel, swept up the first kitten in my arms and followed the mountain cat.



Cat in an Empty Room

The two of us gathered the kittens together, one by one. The mountain cat handed its kittens to me and I dried them with the towel. After which, the seven of us dashed home, swinging up the tree and climbing into my room.

Relieved, I flopped onto my bed, heaving a sigh. The kittens under my raincoat tumbled out, mewling, and begun exploring the room. I took out the towel and dried the mountain cat, before drying myself. *If Dad sees you guys, he would skin you alive*, I warned. *Better lie low*.

That night, I slept with the cats, who cuddled up by my side. When I woke up in the morning they were gone.

When I changed out of my pajamas, preparing to leave the house, my Dad called me over. By the look on his face, what he was about to say didn't seem good.

"We are filing for divorce," he begun. I was not surprised. I always knew this would happen. But what he said next *did* shock me. "Neither of us want to keep you," he told me. His face showed no trace of emotion.

My whole world crashed onto me.

Having parents who didn't show they appreciated you was one thing, but having parents who didn't even *love* you was a totally different thing.

I clenched my jaws in fury. Then what was I even going to live in? In the sewers? By the streets?

As if reading my mind, Dad continued, "we will send you to an orphanage." An *orphanage*? No way was I going to stay in an orphanage. Mom, who was no bet-

ter, seemed to show a slight hint of sympathy. "Go pack your stuff, Xexilya."

Silently, I walked up the stairs. I took out my big, bright red backpack and stuffed all my personal belongings in it. Just five sets of clothes, four thick blankets, a square cushion, a bottle filled with water to the brim, a diary, an encyclopedia of all sorts of animals thinkable, two pens, two pencils, a correction tape, two erasers, a rubber band and a photo of my family. I hesitated as I held the photo in my hands. I was about to put it in the backpack, but on second thought, I ripped it to shreds and threw it out of the window, making sure that the pieces were not too small so they were fairly visible. I watched as it drifted like confetti and landed all over the garden.

I took my backpack, which was almost full, and walked out of my room. I stepped into the garden, where I could see the bits of paper from the photograph scattered around. I jumped into Dad's car, shutting the door behind me with a bang. Dad sat in the driver's seat and drove off wordlessly. I noticed that Mom didn't even say goodbye. As I looked into the rearview mirror, I saw Mom picking up one of the pieces of paper from the floor and looking at it. She disappeared from view as we turned around the corner.

As I remembered how badly my parents had treated me throughout this past twelve years, my heart turned bitter and cold. My eye shone with defiance and I clenched my fists. I felt like screaming. The words I felt like saying rang in my

mind. *I hate you, I hate you all. You never loved me, all you wanted was a son to carry on the family name. You know what, I want to leave and never come back!*

I opened my mouth, wanting to ask my father to pull over. Instead, it came out as a raspy grunt. "What?" dad spoke for the first time in the car. I took a deep breath. "I... I said...p-pull... ov-over."

Dad looked at me and gasped. I was shocked myself too. I was surprised at how smooth my words sounded. Well, kind of. For the first time in my life, I had spoken. "Pull over," my voice sounded confident. It sounded good. Dad continued staring, his mouth hanging open. I glared at him. "*Stop the car, pull over!*" I screamed.

Suddenly, there was a screech. The car behind horned. Quickly, Dad slammed on the breaks and the car stopped with a

jerk. Snatching the opportunity, I flung open the car door and dashed out, without looking back. I ran all the way back to the forest. My red backpack jerked on my back. I prayed that my parents didn't care about me enough to call the police, or I might get tracked down.

I dashed back to the bush where the mountain cats were staying. I had made up my mind. I found them in their usual spot, tearing at the flesh of prey. They looked up as I burst in. I tried speaking to the cat aloud, but this time, no sound came out. So I asked in my mind, *may I stay with you?*

The cat stared deep into my eyes. I could feel my heart thumping in my chest as I held my breath, waiting for an answer. Would the cat accept my request, or deny it?





Callie in School



Hannah Parker, 11
South Burlington, VT

Tree Swallow

By **Claire Rinterknecht**

Illustrated by **Ellie Wilborn**

I OPEN MY EYES and hear a Song Thrush outside. When I was little, my grandfather taught me the names of all the local birds and how to recognize them. His favourite was the Tree Swallow. He loved its shiny green feathers and the way it swooped and flew in the sky. I glance at the clock on the wall; it says 6:30am. I get slowly out of bed, not wanting to go to school.

Last Thanksgiving, Mrs. Kent asked the class to write an essay about something for which we were thankful. Most kids wrote about being thankful for having TVs or the latest computer games. I wrote about my grandfather. He died in October. He was my best friend. We would go to the apple orchard together to eat apples while we bird-watched. But this autumn we didn't get to go because he was sick and a couple of weeks later he died. My life crumbled, like an old wall too tired to keep standing up, once he was gone.

In the essay I spilled my feelings (sadness, fear, dread, anger, questions, spite, longing, and darkness) onto the paper, not knowing that the teacher was going to read them outloud. So, when she did, it kind of scared the class and startled the teacher. They didn't know how to react to what I wrote so they started to avoid me even more than before. I was never one of the group, but when Grandpa was alive it didn't matter because he was the only friend I needed.



Claire Rinterknecht, 12
Strasbourg, France



Ellie Wilborn, 7
Reno, NV

I drag on a pair of jeans and my orange turtleneck. I shuffle down the corridor into the kitchen where Mum is putting a bowl of oatmeal on the table for me.

"Sorry Sweetie, but I have to go to work," she calls as she shuts the front door. "Have a good day!"

"Bye," I mumble in response. It's not her fault she has to go to work so early. Since Grandpa died, I've gotten used to being alone. I pour myself a glass of apple juice and eat my oatmeal. The sun has just started to golden the sky, rays of light seeping through the curtains. I make my lunch, grab my backpack and pull on my red and orange poncho. Out of the house the cool breeze caresses my nose and cheeks. I get my bike out of the garage. It's leaf green and rather muddy.

In the spring air, on my bike, with the wind whipping my face, I feel like a bird. My grandfather used to say I was like a Tree Swallow, flying free, soaring into the clouds. After riding down the hill I go straight on a dusty path, then I turn right onto a track that runs the side of a field. By now the sun has really started spreading its light on the world. Jumping off my bike, I leave it leaning against a bush. I throw my backpack next to it and rush to my oak in the middle of the field. Its gigantic arms are waving at me. I wave back and climb up to the first big branch. Taking the next branch in my hands, I swing myself

up. Up and up I go. Leaves brushing my hair and branches scratching my face. Reaching the top is always the best, the reason I climb my oak every day. To see the world as if I am on top of it.

I'm sitting on the very last branch (it's a bit flimsy but I don't weigh much). From up here I can see the rolling hills and the mountains beyond. As I look over the hills the cool wind ruffles my short brown hair. The wind up here is so much nicer than the wind down below. It's always cool and carries the scent of the hills with it. I found this tree just after my grandfather died. At first I used it as a hide-away, and I still do, but now I come here to hide from the world, not just my grief. I wish I could let go of the branches and fly into the clouds. Not a worry in the world, nobody to tease me, not having to endure school where everyone avoids me. I would be free from all my troubles.

I stay up for a long time and then look at my watch. *Shoot!* I'm going to be late. I scramble down the tree. "Ow!" A branch scratches my cheek. It stings. *Shoot, shoot, shoot.* I run full pelt to my bike, grabbing my bag as I launch myself onto it. I ride as fast as I can, hoping the bell won't ring before I get to class.

I pull open the classroom door just as the bell rings. My hair is wind-swept, my face is flushed and my cheek still stings a little but the man

behind the desk doesn't seem to notice.

"Glad you made it," he says. "Please take your seat."

I sit, wondering what's going on. The man with the awesome ponytail behind the desk isn't Mrs Kent. Someone kicks my chair and someone else whispers but then everybody quiets down as the man at the front starts to speak. "Good morning everybody. I'm going to be your replacement teacher for the rest of the year because Mrs. Kent has just had her baby. My name is Spencer Torents. I love words, dark coffee, and guitars. I also just got back from a month long bicycle trip in New Zealand. Now, I'd like to get to know you guys..."

He's probably going to get us to write a page about ourselves so he can "get to know us." It's not that I don't like writing (I love writing!), it's just that I've learned not to put anything real onto paper.

"So, for homework I would like each and every one of you to make or bring something in that represents you. Then I will ask you to present it and yourself to the class and to me."

My heart sinks. I thought I was going to like him but I can't risk bringing in anything that matters to me.

The rest of the day goes by in a flash of talk and games and work. Mr. Torents knows how to teach and I feel a lot happier at school

even though I'm still not part of the group.

The next morning Mr Torrents is at the back of the classroom holding some paper stars. "Alright everyone, put your books away and listen. We're going to make our own galaxy of words. Every day we're going to put up a new word so eventually we'll have a whole sky full of words. Now does anyone have an idea for today's word?"

Patrick, who moved here last month and who's always very determined to prove himself raises his hand.

"Yes, Patrick?"

"Extraordinary," Patrick says.

"Yeah, you mean extra-ordinary," smirks Sarah to her neighbour.

"Ok...anyone else?" Mr. Torents doesn't hear Sarah.

I raise my hand very slowly and quietly, half hoping he won't notice me.

"Yes, Fern?"

Darn it.

"Gregarious," I blurt out. My face feels as hot as the sun.

"That word is as weird as the person who said it," sniggers Sarah quietly enough that Mr. Torents doesn't hear again but I do.

"Gregarious is a very good word Fern, thank you," Mr. Torents smiles encouragingly at me. "Can you give me the..."

"I have a much better word, Mr. Torents," Sarah butts in.

Mr. Torents ignores Sarah and

keeps his eyes on me. “Fern, can you give me the meaning of gregarious?”

“It means fond of company,” I reply.

“I like the shape of that word. Do you want to write it on a star and stick it to the sky?” he asks me.

I don’t feel like doing anything in front of the class so I say, “No, thank you.”

“Does anyone else want to put it on the sky?” Mr. Torents addresses the whole class.

“Can I do it?” It’s Patrick again.

“Come up here then, Patrick. Do you know how to spell gregarious?”

“No, sorry.” Patrick looks a little sheepish.

“Can anyone help him?”

I know how to spell gregarious as easily as spelling “no, sorry” but I don’t put my hand up. I think Mr. Torents knows I know but thankfully he decides to just tell Patrick himself since no one else can spell it.

“G-R-E-G-A-R-I-O-U-S,” Mr. Torents spells out and Patrick writes the word on an orange star and sticks it to the sky, which is really just a big dark blue piece of paper covering the whole of the back wall.

At the end of the day, the bell



Pontificating

rings and there's a mad rush to leave, but I take my time, not wanting to be in the hullabaloo. As I walk out I say goodbye to Mr. Torents and he says bye back. I have bubbles of happiness inside that I've not felt for a long time. Outside I get my bike and start riding up the path. Sarah glances over her shoulder and sees me. She smirks and whispers something to her friends. When I'm just about to pass them, all five girls spread out across the path and I have to ride into the ditch, almost falling over so as not to hit them. Several happy bubbles pop.

As I reach the hill to my house I stand up on my bike and pedal hard. At the top, I put my bike in the garage. Inside I have a snack and then start thinking about what I should bring in for the homework task. I wonder if I should bring in a book.

UP AT THE TOP of my oak, I'm worrying about talking in front of the class and what people will think about the book I've chosen. I tried to choose a book that I don't like too much because I've learned my lesson about sharing the things I love with other people. I look up and see two swallows dancing below the clouds. I wish I could stay here forever but it's time to go to school.

Lowering myself down I catch my sleeve on something. When I look up to see what it is, I see a shiny green

feather quivering in the fingers of my oak. I reach up and take it. It's soft and silky and I stick it behind my ear. I wonder if it is a gift from my grandfather. I can hear his voice in my head telling me to be strong. I tumble the rest of the way down and ride to school.

IT'S TIME for our presentations. Sarah is going first, as usual. She shows us a fashion magazine that has a bronzed, blond, way too skinny girl on the cover who's not wearing enough clothing. Sarah seems to think she's beautiful.

After Sarah, a few others have their turn and then Patrick goes. He holds up the frond of a fern and starts speaking, "Adiantum are different from all other plants because they don't have fruits, flowers or seeds..."

"That's a fern!" shouts Sarah. The class laughs and my stomach clenches.

"Quiet down class and let Patrick finish," Mr. Torents frowns.


"I love to garden with my mom and whenever I get to choose a plant to grow I choose ferns because I love their form and they remind me of the forest where I used to go on walks with my family before we moved."

Mr. Torents asks me to go next. I take a deep breath and stand up. I brush the hair out of my face and feel the feather.

"Hello, my name is Fern. My

Grandpa died in October. We used to go bird watching together which is why I have brought in this feather.” I pull the feather from behind my ear and hold it up. “Birds may be something that not many of you think about very much, but imagine, every morning they are able to spread their wings and soar into the sky. I envy birds but I am also glad that I am a human because we can do so many wonderful and marvelous things. My grandfather taught me there would always be people in the world who would try to push you to the ground when you wanted

to fly. But that there would also be people who would make your life one that you wouldn’t swap for any other. Who would care and laugh and dream with you. My grandfather was that person for me. He loved and cared and dreamed with me and I miss him a lot but I know that he would want me to remember him and smile.”

There is complete silence in the room. Then Mr. Torrents starts clapping. The whole class joins in. Sarah looks confused. Glancing at Patrick, I notice he’s smiling at me so I smile right back. 



Silhouette City



Lara Katz, 14
Weston, CT

Afternoon Turns to Evening

By Laura Halliday



Laura Halliday, 13
Sydney, Australia

afternoon turns to evening
we wait

cockatoos call through rustling trees
their voices harsh,
jeering, even—
as though mocking us

with their secret language

water strokes the land's edge
with little splashes—*plop*,
plop.

and then
three white specks
soar over the water
and onto the trees beyond

if we were close enough,
we could hear the rustling of wings
as they land
instead,
we imagine it

as though encouraged
more cockatoos make the journey
we count the splashes of white
as though they were stars —
eighteen, nineteen, twenty—
now a whole group has burst from their hiding place
still more come
the air a frenzied mass of white

finally, with agonising slowness,
the last one makes its way over the water
to the trees beyond
this one is the teenager, the rebel
we watch as it flutters in mid-air
before choosing a branch to settle on

the water begins to whisper once more
the trees resume their chatter
satisfied, we leave

behind us,
a blanket of cockatoos stifles the trees

Sea Creature

By Sophia Gallegos



Sophia Gallegos, 13
Kula, HI

DESCENDING. You go down, and as you go down the light begins to change. You notice scattered fish in the upper level. Then you see the yellow light that brightens the surface dim. As it dims, the creatures become darker, as if to blend in with their watery homes.

Like a rain forest, the sea has levels, and as you go down it's as if you are in an elevator. Every floor is like the changing of a color. You feel as if you are descending into your grandfather's basement that is full of relics he obtained when he was a kid.

Then you've reached it, the light switch in the basement. It brightens the room with wonder. You gasp as the large and gel-like silk body balloons past. You have never seen anything like it. Its limbs wave like spaghetti as you twirl it on your fork. Its body has slight color, you suppose, but you can't be certain due to the lack of light. It looks a bit like velvet and you long to touch the large jellyfish but remembering that jellyfish usually sting, you retreat. Noticing that this one seems to have blubbery limbs, you begin to wonder. Then your question is answered. A fish swims down from above and you watch as the large jellyfish grabs the fish with its limbs instead of stinging it. It shoves the fish into its balloon of a body and relishes the taste. You study it, and as it begins to descend you follow. It descends. You descend.

Then panting, the purple brightens and sunlight breaks through the dark. I wake up. The version of me in the dream dies. "I know it's real!" I say.

I rub the sleepy sand from my eyes as I slowly put on my slippers. I stare at the snowflake patterns for a second. Then I announce the declaration in my head that I made two minutes previous. I know it's real! I shake my head as if to release the memories of my dream so that they fall out my left ear and land in a pool by my bed. But, unsuccessful with the extraction, I simply get up.

I stumbled to the kitchen where my dad was making waffles in our Belgian waffle maker. The upturned belly of my cat gave me a smile, and I rubbed her as she purred with her face pressed against the heater. I then stood up and helped my dad with the waffles. As I poured the batter into the iron, I wondered why waffles were only made in one print of checkered squares instead of many different patterns. It seemed dumb to have a singular pattern. I wished I could eat a waffle that had birds flying across it or a large elephant eating a leaf. Then I thought of all the people in the world and their differences and how maybe we had in some era agreed to make waffles the same so that we could all be united by them. Maybe so that we could feel as if we were all sharing something because waffles had a standard, and we had created that together. Nodding to myself, I decided that that was the answer. Then I quickly ate my waffle as I read the front page of the news. My dad tugged the news away from me saying that my young eyes shouldn't be infected

with that rubbish. I sighed and stood up to get ready for school.

After I had meticulously packed my school things in the order I would take my classes, I walked to the bus stop. There I met my friend Jez (short for Jezelle). "Judy!" she called. Looking up I smiled, but I noticed a group of kids surrounding her. Wondering how she could

have possibly become popular in one night I ran over to her.

There was a circle of mist around her from all of the open mouths that were breathing into the crisp air. Everyone was singing along to the song


that Jezelle was playing from her iPod. They sang, "Hey Jude, don't be afraid, take a sad song and make it better." A smile broke across my chilled face because I realized that they were singing to me!

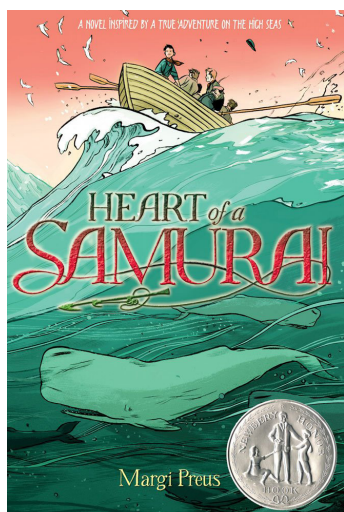
I smiled at them all and as I did I thought way, way, way, back

Judy was born on crisp November morning. The first few years of her life had been spent doing the usual things like learning words and burping. When she was five, she got a bike and it immediately became her best friend. When she was eight, she took interest in creating small board games, but after a kid named Walter destroyed her best one, she gave up. When she was nine, she became best friends with Jezelle and they have been friends ever since.

But the most important thing in her life happened when she was eleven.

But the most important thing in her life happened when she was eleven. Ten days after her eleventh birthday, her grandfather passed away. When sorting through his old things, she found a dust-covered journal. The journal held so many secrets that it took her the whole year to figure everything out. When she finally finished reading the journal, she read it again and once more after that. The journal told of many different sea creatures that were so foreign, few believed that they even existed. But Judy refused to just push them aside, even though

her father had told her many times that no such creatures could possibly be real. Judy decided to take the matter into her own hands and began to look up many of the creatures on the internet. To her dismay, she could not find many of the creatures that were in the journal. She found references to a few, but the most profound one she discovered was a large jellyfish that had thick limbs and velvety looking skin. She knew that one day she would search for it and she could not wait for the day when she would begin. 



Book Review

By William Cui

Heart of a Samurai, by Margi Preus;
Abrams/Amulet: New York, 2010; \$12.45

WHAT WOULD YOU DO if you were stranded on an island with your friends and you were rescued by people you know as barbarians? Now you have to live with them. You must feel hopeless, dreadful, desperate. Step right into the shoes of Manjiro, a Japanese child isolated from the outside world. On his island, everyone calls Americans barbarians! And Americans were the ones that rescued him. Can you imagine that? And even worse, he can't go back to his home in Japan. The book *Heart of a Samurai* by Margi Preus teaches people that just because everything is new, that doesn't mean they are in a barbaric or hopeless situation; people need to adapt.

This book is based on a true story and is set during 1841, when whaling was an important part of the American economy. Manjiro, a Japanese child living on a remote Japanese island, finds himself stranded on another island after a storm during his fishing duty. He and his four friends were found by an American whaling boat and brought to the United States because the Japanese did not let anyone enter their borders regardless if they were Japanese or not.

As I was reading this book, I thought back to when I was in second grade. I moved from California to Massachusetts. The entire situation for me seemed



William Cui, 11
Lexington, MA

unfamiliar. I didn't know who anybody was; I had no idea where I was and Massachusetts seemed like an alien place to me. It was like the people of California were no longer with me and I had a whole new unfamiliar life. No one knew me; I knew no one. This place to me was foreign, alien, new, strange, uncharted. But, my fear's grip loosened when I slowly started to get used to the environment. Everything started to work out, bit by bit. Even though the scale of our relocations are different, I could connect a lot to how Manjiro felt when he was in America. But as Manjiro got used to America, he made it his home--just how I made Massachusetts my home.

The author wrote this book mainly because Manjiro was the first Japanese citizen to learn English and go to America. During that time period, nobody knew what Japan was like and the Japanese didn't know what the outside world was like. Until Manjiro. The world had a problem with connection and unity and Manjiro fixed the problem without even knowing it. That happened because he adapted to the environment unlike his friends who gave up and ran off without trying and persevering.

After reading this, I could connect to Manjiro so much because of what I've been through. It made me rethink myself and capture memories of when I just moved here. This book portrayed adapting to new circumstances powerfully.



Honor Roll

Welcome to the *Stone Soup* Honor Roll! We receive hundreds of submissions every month by kids from around the world. Unfortunately, we don't have space to publish all the great work we receive. We want to commend some of these talented writers and artists and encourage them to keep creating.

— *The Editors*

Stories

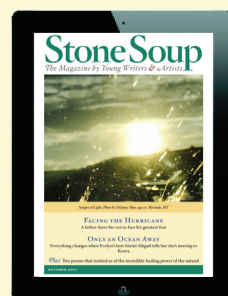
Laurel Aronian, 10
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Bonus Materials

At StoneSoup.com

- Twenty years of back issues in the *Stone Soup* Archives. (Every story, every poem, every book review!)
- Blog posts by the editors and by guest bloggers, filled with great ideas for teachers and young writers.
- Video interviews with *Stone Soup* authors and illustrators. Meet some of your favorite contributors!
- Video interviews with beloved children's book authors, including Madeleine L'Engle and Rick Riordan.
- Video performances by talented young musicians, dancers, and poets.

On Our YouTube Channel

- *Stone Soup* authors and illustrators talk about their work.

In Our Apps (Apple & Android)

- All of the above in mobile form!