

Stone Soup

The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists



Illustration by Claire Neviasser, age 13, from "The Chicken Coop," page 9

IN THE KNIGHTS' ABSENCE

Her kingdom is under attack, and Kythia wants to defend it

PARTING IS SUCH SWEET SORROW

A performance of *Romeo and Juliet* brings two friends closer together

Also: Illustrations by Elizabeth Wright and Leigh Marie Marshall
A poem about soccer

JULY/AUGUST 2004

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Stone Soup

The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists

VOLUME 32, NUMBER 6

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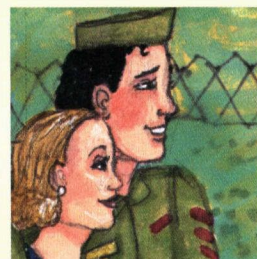
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Stone Soup

The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists

WELCOME TO ALL OUR READERS, old and new! We've had the pleasure of publishing *Stone Soup* for over 30 years. It is our belief that, by presenting rich, heart-felt work by young people the world over, we can stir the imaginations of our readers and inspire young writers and artists to create.



Jessie Moore, 12

Contributors' Guidelines

Stone Soup welcomes submissions from young people through age 13. For our complete guidelines, please visit our Web site at www.stonesoup.com.

Story and poem authors: Please do not enclose a self-addressed envelope

with your submission. Send copies of your work, not originals. If we decide to consider your work for a future issue, you will hear from us in four to six weeks. If you do not hear from us, it means we were not able to use your work. Don't be discouraged! Try again!

Book reviewers: If you are interested in reviewing books for *Stone Soup*, write editor Gerry Mandel. Tell her a little about yourself and the kinds of books you like to read. Enclose an SASE for her reply.

Artists: If you would like to illustrate for *Stone Soup*, send Ms. Mandel some samples of your art work, along with a letter saying what you like to draw most. Enclose an SASE for her reply. We need artists who can draw or paint complete scenes in color. Please send color copies of your work, not originals.

All contributors: Send us writing and art about the things you feel most strongly about! Whether your work is about imaginary situations or real ones, use your own experiences and observations to give your work depth and a sense of reality. Send your work to *Stone Soup*, Submissions Dept., P.O. Box 83, Santa Cruz, CA 95063. Include your name, age, birthdate, home address and phone number.

Cover: Claire Neviasser, of Madison, Wisconsin, is a talented 13-year-old artist who has illustrated several stories for *Stone Soup* over the past few years. Her watercolor paintings for "The Chicken Coop," by Sophie Eisenberg-Edidin, have an old-fashioned quality that's just right for this story.

The Mailbox



LBP, 9

I'd like to compliment all those talented young writers out there. You are so good! After each story I read, I think, "You have got to be kidding me! A ten-year-old (or whatever age) wrote that? Just ten years of experience and they sound like a sixty-year-old pro!" I've never come across an OK story. They're all excellent! Then, I look at the art work and feel like asking, "When's your next art show? I'll be there!" They're that good! Great job everyone!

SARAH KATHLEEN APPLETON, 11
San Luis Obispo, California

I've read some books that came out in the past few months and might be of interest to future book reviewers. They are *Trickster's Choice* by Tamora Pierce and *Pirates!* by Celia Rees. I enjoyed them and maybe an upcoming book reviewer will too. Also, another book I'd strongly recommend is *King of Shadows* by Susan Cooper. I know it came out a few years ago, but it's excellent. I might be a little biased, though, because I love Shakespeare.

HANNAH POSTEL, 12
Madison, Wisconsin

Hannah's story, "Parting Is Such Sweet Sorrow," appears on page 22 of this issue.

I absolutely loved "The Kingdom of Stones" by Megan M. Gannett [March/April 2004]. It is a poem in itself, what with its gracefully woven description, sensitive character development, and more! The pictures, I must say, were excellent and reflected perfectly the powerful emotions sent from the story. It is perfectly written and describes a unique individual with such depth.

SUSANNAH BENJAMIN, 10
Greenwich, Connecticut

I am writing to compliment Asif Rahman on his story, "World War II Story" in the July/August 2003 issue. It held my attention through the whole story and it was immensely sad and well written. Great job! And (as usual!) Martin Taylor's illustrations were fantastic.

ANNA SHAULL, 13
Baltimore, Maryland

See Martin's collected illustrations in the Art section of our Web site: www.stonesoup.com

I am a middle school creative writing teacher. I loved your magazine when I first saw it and decided to use it with my sixth-grade classes. It is impossible to describe how much they loved it. Showing them what others their age and even younger have achieved has caused them to want to reach for just such an accomplishment themselves. Thank you for your devotion to your task. Your work makes a dream coming true possible to them.

MARION RUPP
Swampscott, Massachusetts

I bought the book *Girl of Kosovo* out of my school book order in fourth grade. A year later, I still hadn't read it. Then I read the review in *Stone Soup* for *Girl of Kosovo* [September/October 2003] and it made me start reading the book! I love *Girl of Kosovo*. Thank you. I also started reading *A Greater Goode* because of a review [March/April 2003]. I am so thankful to have found great books. Thanks!

KATHARINE BUCKMASTER, 11
Bellevue, Washington

You can read all the stories and reviews mentioned in The Mailbox on our Web site: www.stonesoup.com

Note to our readers: Send us your letters! We are especially interested in detailed comments about specific stories, poems, book reviews, and illustrations. We'd also like to receive anecdotes (150 words or less) about interesting experiences you'd like to share with our readers. Send letters to The Mailbox, Stone Soup, P.O. Box 83, Santa Cruz, CA 95063. Include your name, age, address, and phone number.



Kythia stood at the battlements, clutching a bow expertly in one hand

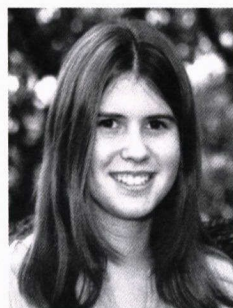
In the Knights' Absence

By Emma Kilgore Hine

Illustrated by Chloe Scheffe

KYTHIA AWOKE TO THE SOUND of trumpets announcing her father's departure. She grunted and sat up abruptly, stretching stiff muscles. She had wished to speak with her father, Sir Farlan, before he and his knights left the castle to assist their fellow countrymen in battle. Kythia knew that if more troops weren't sent to help Queen Jocunda all of their kingdom of Naranth would be overrun by the power-hungry Rylions. Still, she wished her father had had time to plead her cause to her mother, Lady Amaria. Amaria wanted a daughter who would embroider tapestries, regally order servants to do her bidding, and wear elaborate gowns of silk and brocade. Kythia herself wanted to be a hero, someone portrayed in tapestries. She wanted to wear mail and carry a sword, and save all of Naranth. All Sir Farlan wanted was for his family to be content, and therefore it was always easy to enlist his help in halting Amaria's next lecture.

Kythia sighed; now there was no prolonging the inevitable tirade. Her mother had caught her on her palfrey, tilting (or trying to) at a quintain. The poor horse was bewildered and jumped at the slightest sound. Amaria had let out such an unladylike war cry as to spook the horse, meant only for pleasure, into throwing its passenger, and the glint in the noble lady's eyes threatened hell to pay. Kythia stood, wincing as her sore limbs stretched, and limped to the five-foot-tall mirror that had been her thirteenth birthday present. She tossed her waist-length hair, admiring the way the auburn tresses caught the



Emma Kilgore Hine, 12
Austin, Texas



Chloe Scheffe, 13
Bellingham, Washington

light, then, grimacing, reached for the forest-green gown that supposedly brought out the color of her already striking hazel eyes. Although the dress was stunning, she knew she'd look better in armor.

THAT MORNING (after the lecture at breakfast) Kythia endured dancing lessons, then embroidery—two of her most hated activities. Nothing was worse than what came after the three-course midday meal, though: fittings. She was making her appearance at court in April, as did every other fifteen-year-old of high blood. The only pleasant part of this trip would be meeting with Queen Jocunda. The Queen was everything Kythia wished to be. She was a warrior, yet could be a proper, beautiful lady when she wished. She was a superb horsewoman and the heroine of every ballad. Meeting her would be wondrous.

Kythia was suddenly brought back to reality as the beautiful aqua-colored gown, her mother's choice, was draped over her slim shoulders. She sighed and resigned herself to an eternity of measurements and servants' gossip.

"Did you hear that there's a chance of the Rylions attacking near here?"

"Oh, that's not true. You know that Sir Farlan would never let them past him."

"Word has it that battle was just a diversion, and their real motive is to take this castle and the lands around it."

Kythia had heard this theory several times, and had yet to believe it. It would

be exciting, though—trumpets blaring, banners waving just beyond the window. Oh, glory, maybe Queen Jocunda would even lead the rescue . . .

That was odd. Kythia was sure she had just heard trumpets, even war cries. She shook her head, trying to clear it of what was obviously her imagination.

Then her mother, Amaria, dashed into the room and cried that, yes, there *was* a Rylion attack and the knights were gone, fighting miles away! This time, the gossip was correct.

That was when panic broke loose. Serving women shrieked and ran about. Villagers had already begun to enter the castle, the safest place around. Kythia maneuvered through it all, trying to reach the battlements. Her heart hammered; her hair flew out of place as she, still in her fine gown, scrambled to where she could help defend her people and her home. She couldn't let her mother and servants die or be captured. As she ran, she issued orders for vats of hot oil, bows and arrows, and as many spears as they had. She grabbed a boy about her age and gave him a message to take as quickly as possible to the nearest estate: "We're under attack, and the men are gone. Please, help."

KYTHIA STOOD at the battlements, clutching a bow expertly in one hand and felling the enemy below as fast as she could fire. She'd secretly learned archery as a child, and was a fair shot. The most stalwart of the servants, men and women, assisted her, and the rest were

huddled with Amaria in the most protected rooms.

Load. Fire. Watch her victim fall. Load. Fire. Kythia worked herself into a rhythm. She shut her mind to the screams of those she killed in self-defense, although she knew they would haunt her dreams.

A pain-filled shriek forced her to look beside her. One of the gossips that had been fitting her dress had fallen, struck by a deadly arrow. Blood spurted from her, showering the cold stone wall. Kythia took a moment to kneel beside her servant and gently close the eyes of the old woman.

Kythia's dress was ripped and hanging off one shoulder, the height of impropriety. Her hair was loose and tangled and tinted with soot. Her face was streaked with sweat, blood, and dirt. Yet Kythia was beautiful, wild and willful, standing in the battlements and crying out against all who defied her. She grinned; Lady Amaria would swoon with shock to see her daughter like this.


AFTER IT WAS all over Kythia sat in her spacious apartments and thought about the entire incident. They had won; serving women and one noble girl had held their own against a troop from the greatest army in the realm until proper warriors could be summoned. Perhaps an angel was with her, watching over her;

perhaps it was just pure luck. Anyhow, she and the servants had done it, and Kythia was proud.

A knock at the door startled her out of her reverie. She jumped, and before she could respond the door opened and admitted Amaria and . . . someone. This woman was tall, slim, and muscular, with jet-black hair and brilliant violet eyes. She carried a sword at her side and wore mail so beautiful as to astound even Amaria. She stepped forward and said in a throaty, commanding voice, "I am Jocunda. Am I correct in assuming that you, Kythia, are responsible for the defeat of the Rylyon troop?"

Kythia, nervous at being addressed by her sovereign and heroine, reverently whispered, "Yes, Majesty. I am Kythia, and I suppose you could say that I am responsible."

AFTER JOCUNDA had addressed Kythia and her mother for several minutes she took her leave, promising to speak more at the dawn. Amaria, at her daughter's questioning glance, responded, "Her Majesty the Queen was visiting a nearby estate, and, when messengers arrived, requesting help with the wounded, she made haste to accompany the party.

"Kythia . . ." Her tone was soft, shy, forgiving. "I'm proud of you. Oh, Kythia, I'm so proud." 



"Maggie, Kathy, Linda, it's your father, it's your papa come home!" she cried

The Chicken Coop

By **Sophie Eisenberg-Edidin**

Illustrated by **Claire Neviaser**

IT WAS A HOT DAY when he came home. Our farm was sweating under the Mississippi sun, even though it was only May, and I was out feeding the chickens. It's my job, being ten and the youngest of three. The war was over, I'd heard. All the newspapers were proclaiming that the Nazis were defeated. Of course, I was happy, but after a while the effect wore off. Mama was cleaning the house and singing. That's what she does when she is glad. I could guess why, having been told joyfully something about my father coming home. Still, it was such a surprise when he actually did.

I had only vague memories of him, having been six when he got drafted. My last image of him, before he drove away, was of him standing on our porch, staring blankly at a photo of Mama. I remember it had always been his favorite picture. In it my mother is standing in our overgrown garden, holding a tomato. He said she looked beautiful standing there. I remember when we took the picture with the family camera. My father was so happy that day. He was always happy. That was the main thing I remembered of him. I also could picture him, when I thought really hard. He had short, curly, black hair, a rosy face, and dark green eyes. He always used to say that we were alike as two peas in a pod, so I supposed we were, but our mirror had been shattered a year ago and somehow we still hadn't replaced it.

"Maggie!" an excited shriek sounded, "Maggie, he's here!"

The meaning of those words took a moment to register, but then I dashed inside the house. My sisters, Kathy and Linda,



Sophie Eisenberg-Edidin, 13
New York, New York



Claire Neviaser, 13
Madison, Wisconsin

were already there.

"Come on, we have to get washed up!" tittered Kathy.

We all tore upstairs. I washed my face and hands, brushed my hair and put on a clean dress. Kathy and Linda were already scurrying downstairs, so I hastened after them. We all met at the landing. Kathy, one year older, and Linda, two, did not remember our father much better than I and we all exchanged fearful glances before walking out to meet him.

We hurried down the driveway and there he was. He was hugging Mama and Mama was crying and laughing. We all slowed our pace. Kathy was chewing her tongue, a habit she had when she was anxious. Just then Mama spotted us.

"Maggie, Kathy, Linda, it's your father, it's your papa come home!" she cried.

Papa—the word sounded strange. "Papa" looked our way with a grin; he was a changed man. As we got closer we could see that, despite his grin, his eyes were haunted and sad, his face taut, his body thin. We smiled uncertainly back. He opened his arms wide and we ran to them, not knowing what to say. He hugged us tight, as if to anchor himself to something. At last Papa let us go. He held us at arm's length and scanned our faces.

"Maggie, Kathy, Linda," he murmured, and then his face grew glad once more, "is there anything to eat? I must say, I can't recommend army food. I got some pork and potatoes for 20 cents when we arrived, but otherwise I haven't had anything."

My mother, glowing, hustled us all into

the house. "Maggie, Kathy, get some coffee ready and Linda, will you be a dear and get out the canned peas, the fresh ones aren't ripe yet . . . oh, and see if there is any sugar left. When will this rationing stop?"

Mama, Linda and Kathy sat down in their customary seats, but Papa was sitting in mine! Didn't he remember that he sat to the right of me? I glared at his back, but sat down in his seat instead.

The meal was a quiet one. Mama tried to keep the conversation going, but after a while, talk withered. Soon, silence presided at the table. Papa ate hungrily, his manners cruder than I remembered, and then leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes. Mama immediately jumped to her feet.

"Oh William, what was I thinking? You must be tired after such a long journey. Come, the bed is made up, I'll awaken you for dinner."

Papa opened his eyes and allowed himself to be led upstairs, without saying a word.

Kathy, Linda and I were holding a conference in the pigsty.

"He seems so changed," said Linda.

"I know—I don't know what to say to him anymore," whispered Kathy.

"He's a stranger," I said under my breath. No one heard.

"But Mama's happy, so we must be kind to him—and he is our papa," proclaimed Linda dutifully.

We all nodded, and that signified the end of our meeting because Linda was the oldest and usually got the last word.

The next day, I woke up at three o'clock in the morning. I had a vague feeling that something exciting had happened the day before, but it took me a moment before I realized what it was. I shot up and got out of bed, careful not to wake my sisters, slumbering beside me. All I knew was I wanted to get outside, away from the stranger who was boarding free in our house.

"I know where I'll go," I said to myself, "to the chicken coop!"

The chicken coop was where I always went when I was upset. The quiet breathing and clucking of the birds soothed me. I slipped swiftly down the stairs and out the door, still in my nightgown. It was still dark outside and the fresh air greeted my nostrils with a pleasant tang. I walked down the path to the coop, glad to be alone, when out of the blue there formed a shape. As I got closer I could see it was a man. His form looked familiar and suddenly I realized . . . it was Papa.

At first I was annoyed—he was pacing back and forth right on the path to the chicken coop! Then something about his face captured my attention. He still had not seen me and as I gazed at him, something in the way he was smiling to himself brought back memories. As if through a fog, I could suddenly see him jiggling me on his knee, singing with me, showing me how to milk the cow, letting me ride on his shoulders, buying me trinkets when he went to town . . . He looked so different now, so steeped in sadness. I turned around and went back to the house.

It was seven and we had all gathered around the table to eat breakfast. Eggs that I had gathered that morning sizzled in pans. Papa was again sitting in the wrong seat.

"Papa," I said tentatively, "Papa, that is my seat. Don't you remember?" Trembling, I waited for his reply.

"I'm sorry, Maggie," he said, eyes distant as he shifted over, "it's been a long time, but now I remember." He smiled.

We ate our eggs quietly, but the silence wasn't as tense as the night before. Suddenly Papa laughed out loud, then looked slightly abashed. "What?" we all asked.

"It's just that," he mumbled and glanced at Mama, "we never . . . well we, and mind you, it was only because we never got them in the army, we . . ."

"Yes?" we all asked eagerly.

Papa steeled himself and then said in a rush, "Well, we used to steal eggs from farms along the road."

He looked so embarrassed that we all laughed, but I privately wondered what else about Papa I did not know and I looked at him in a new way. My own papa had secrets! That was a surprise. It suddenly occurred to me that I had never asked him about the war and I determined to do just so, next time I saw him alone.

I had just finished feeding the chickens and was stroking my favorite one, a little brown bird, when I heard whistling and saw Papa coming up the path. I quickly hid where a stretch of trees started. Papa



I had just finished feeding the chickens when I saw Papa coming up the path

sighed as he finally topped the hill and made his way over to the coop. What was he doing? He reached for the bag of chicken feed.

"No!" I cried, as I rushed out from my hiding place. "No, they've already been fed." I lowered my head. What had gotten into me, uncovering myself like that?

"What?" Papa ducked and made as if to grab something before he saw it was me. "Maggie? Do I have a spy for a daughter?" he said, laughing.

"N- n- no," I stuttered, "I was gathering, um, peaches."

"Oh, really? I was not aware that

peaches were ripe in May." His eyes danced.

I blushed and twisted my fingers. And then I remembered something. May, May ...

"May!" I exploded, "Your birthday is in May!"

"Yes," Papa said, smiling, "but it has passed already. However, we should be thinking of someone else's soon enough, hmmm?" He flicked his fingers at my chin.

"Oh yeah!" I cried excitedly. "June 6! I'm going to be ten years old!"

A darkness fell over Papa's face. "Was

that when it was?" he murmured to himself.

"What's wrong, Papa?" I asked, scared I'd offended him.

"Last year—did you hear?—last year, something bad, well actually good, but bad too, happened on that day."

"Yes?" I said, eager to hear about the war.

"Well, that day is called D-Day. That was just a code that we used to refer to the day of an operation," he began, and suddenly I was lost in a world of death and struggle.

I heard through dimmed ears of arriving at Normandy on a boat, of being shoved out into the sea with thousands of your comrades, guns clutched in numbed hands. I heard of wading through the water to shore, while all around soldiers fell, and of shooting blindly. I heard of collapsing on the beach, but having to get back up, while others surged out from the sea. I heard of trampling bodies, of the terror that killed all feeling. And finally, I heard of a pale, exhausted victory.

"That is what happened on your birthday," Papa said, bringing me back to the farm. "Didn't you ever wonder why I didn't write?"

I squirmed, "No, not . . . not really. You see, you had been gone a long time and I . . . and I, well you weren't that clear in my mind and . . . well, I could see Mama was very worried about something, but then we got your next letter and she was happy so . . ." I stuttered to a halt.

Papa stared at me bitterly for a mo-

ment, then grinned, but his eyes did not smile. I suddenly felt pity for him and I threw my arms around him.

THAT EVENING, Papa seemed happier than I had yet seen him, as if a great weight had been taken off his shoulders. I supposed the talk with me really helped him. He had probably been keeping everything bottled up. I felt good about myself.

"Martha, this stew is just delicious!" exclaimed Papa.

Mama beamed, as she opened a can of peaches. "We have peaches for desert! And I think we can spare a tiny bit of sugar to welcome you home!" Mama kissed Papa on the forehead.

IT WAS ALMOST sunset. I walked up the path to the chicken coop. It lay on top of a hill and the view was lovely from there. As I reached the top, however, once again I saw Papa. He was sitting on the fence of the coop. A brief twinge of resentment touched me, but left. Because suddenly I remembered, seeing Papa sitting there, how familiar the scene was. And then I recalled how, before he left, we used to spend every evening up by the coop. I would sit in his lap and we would watch the sunset while I drifted off to sleep.

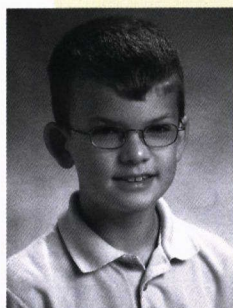
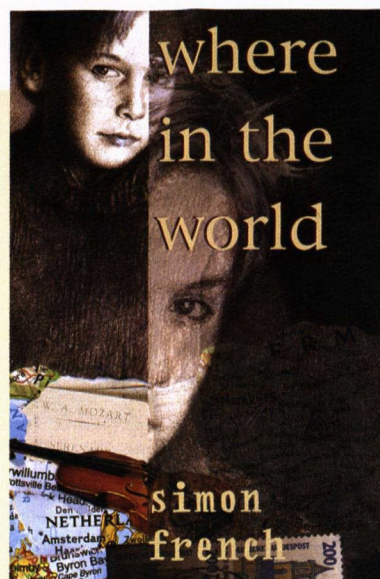
"Papa?" I whispered.

He turned my way and I ran to him, but I didn't sit in his lap. I sat down beside him and held him in my arms. We watched the sun set. ❀

Book Review

By Bill T. Hallahan

Where in the World by Simon French;
Peachtree Publishers: Atlanta, 2003; \$14.95



Bill T. Hallahan, 10
Nashua, New Hampshire

HAVE YOU EVER NOT wanted to do something, but been forced to do it anyway? Ari, a boy with an extraordinary gift for music, certainly was in *Where in the World* when Mr. Lee, his music teacher, tried to make him play the violin at an end-of-the-year recital. As I read I thought about how much like me Ari was. I was nervous the first time I played a piano in front of people I didn't know because I was afraid that I would make a mistake and look foolish. Since I got a lot of encouragement from my parents, grandparents and music teacher I got up the courage to try even though I was still scared. As soon as I began to play I forgot that I even had an audience until they started to applaud at the end. Now I look forward to concerts. A similar situation happened to Ari too. Ari enjoyed playing the violin for fun and for his parents' enjoyment but he didn't want to play at the end-of-the-year recital because he was embarrassed about playing the violin. He was afraid that other children would tease him. One day while his friend, Thomas, was over, Ari's grandfather called on the telephone and asked to hear Ari play the violin. After he was done Thomas asked Ari whether he would play some more songs for him because he thought they sounded beautiful. Ari thought

Thomas was teasing him and he put the violin away. Several weeks later Ari's stepfather, Jamie, asked Ari whether he would consider playing the violin for his mother's birthday at the café his parents owned. Ari's mother and Jamie always played music to entertain the customers after dinner. Ari said that he would consider it. He didn't know what to do but finally he made up his mind to play at the café because he loved his mother so much and wanted to make her proud. When he did he discovered that he liked playing in front of other people. He and the audience appreciated each other. That was the turning point where he realized that he could play at the recital without any fears.

The author, Simon French, can make you feel sad, happy, or even disappointed for Ari. One point where I particularly noticed this was when Ari's grandfather died. Even though none of my grandparents have died I can't imagine life without any of them. After his grandfather died Ari said that he never wanted to play a violin again. This was probably due to the fact that his grandfather had taught him to play the violin. His parents told him how much talent he had and encouraged him to develop that talent and not let it go to waste. He realized that his grandfather would want him to continue playing. Mr. Lee was hired to teach Ari.

As I read I realized that it's impossible to go through life always getting your way. Sooner or later someone will make you do something you don't want to. New experiences can be scary but can lead to exciting new opportunities.

I strongly recommend this book. It is impossible not to like Ari and sympathize with the difficult situations that he has to overcome. Whether the reader is a musician or not all of us have to face trying new situations as we grow. ❀



"Amy," interrupted Erica, "if you're going to talk, try to paddle at the same time"

Canoeing

By Madelon Case

Illustrated by Emily Culbert

THE GREENISH LAKE SHIMMERED in the summer sunlight, reflecting a wavy picture of the tree-topped cliffs encircling it on three sides. Ten girls in dirty orange life vests stood along the strip of pebbled beach talking amongst themselves. Between them and the water were several green canoes, a pile of paddles, and a tall blond counselor also wearing a life vest, desperately trying to get their attention.

"Listen up, girls!" she said loudly. Most of the group turned toward her, but two girls kept talking. "Erica, Becky, the longer this takes, the less time you'll have on the lake, OK?" The two girls jerked their heads around. "All right then. We've gone over the safety procedures and you all know how to paddle and steer, so this time I'll just let you start out without a lesson first. I'm going to put you into pairs this time so there's no trouble over who goes with whom. Becky, go with Jennifer. Haley will be with Nicole, and I'll ride in their canoe. Lucy can go with Breanna, Maria with Lindsey, and Amy with Erica. I want you to go to the middle of the lake and practice steering by going in circles, clockwise, then counterclockwise. Listen for my whistle. I'll blow it when it's time to go in. OK, you're off!"

Talking and laughing once again, the girls headed for the canoes. "Did you hear that?" said Erica quietly to Becky as they walked down toward the canoes. "I have to be with Amy! I hope she isn't *too* annoying."

"Yeah, good luck. See ya later," replied Becky, smiling sympathetically as she strolled toward where Jennifer was already



Madelon Case, 13
Beaverton, Oregon



Emily Culbert, 12
Chicago, Illinois

pushing their canoe into the water.

Amy walked over to Erica, holding out a paddle. Amy's long light brown hair was tied up with wide pink ribbon in a ponytail centered on top of her head, a style that the other girls had rolled their eyes at as they stood in front of the bathroom mirror that morning. "Here, Erica, I got you a paddle so you wouldn't have to go get one yourself." She gave Erica a friendly grin, glanced at her feet, and launched into fast-paced babble. "You might wanna take off your tennis shoes, you know. I had my shoes on last time we canoed, and they're *still* so wet they squish when I walk, since you have to walk out, like, a foot into the water to get into the canoe, and also if you tip you really don't wanna have shoes that will weigh you down. It would be horrible to drown in this icky lake just because of your shoes, wouldn't it? I think we're both pretty good at swimming, but still, it's a scary thought. I just left my shoes back at the cabin and walked out here barefoot, even though you're not really supposed to, but no one cares."

Erica nodded slightly and turned toward the one unclaimed canoe before Amy could say more. She pushed the canoe into the water. "Come on, get in. I'll be in the front."

Amy walked into the water. She made a face. "The bottom of the lake feels so gross between my toes! I hate to think about what's down there—you know, it's mostly just mud, but I bet there's some fish poop too, since we saw those fish

jumping on our morning hike, remember? That really cool blue one? Well, no one else saw it, but I saw it and really wished I had brought my fishing pole, but Mom wouldn't let me because I might lose it. Oh, that's so gross that I'm walking in fish poop. And probably rotted plants too. And other stuff I don't even wanna know!" She climbed into the boat, staring down at her bare feet. "Look! There's a little glob! And it's a really sick color of brown! Eeewww."

Erica sighed, pushing the boat out. "Here, put my paddle in the boat. Thanks." Amy took the paddle and stayed silent for a moment as Erica pushed the boat away from shore and climbed in. They both started paddling.

"Weren't the tacos last night really good?" Amy said suddenly, pausing in her paddling. "I just love Mexican food. Aside from pizza, it might just be my favorite kind of food. And at this other camp, the one with horses I told you about yesterday, they had even better tacos, with really good hot sauce, but I ate only one because I was feeling sick, and then later that night I threw up, so it kind of ruined it. But my mom makes really good . . ."

"Amy," interrupted Erica, "if you're going to talk, try to paddle at the same time, because we're veering off to the side."

"Oh, OK. Well anyway, my mom . . ."

"No, no! You should paddle on the opposite side from me when we're going straight. If we both paddle on the left, we turn into shore, but we need to go straight

out into the lake. Just watch me and think about where we're going, and you'll figure it out."

"OK, sure. Well, as I was saying, my mom makes really good burritos, especially when she makes them spicy, and . . ."

Erica whirled around. "Paddle on the right!"

"But you're paddling on the right!"

"We both have to so we can turn away from shore. Then we'll do opposite sides to go straight." Erica sighed in exasperation. "Do you get it?"

Amy nodded enthusiastically. "Yeah, I do, I really do, but it's just I was thinking about my mom's burritos and I sort of forgot."

"Maybe you should stop talking about burritos for a little so we can focus on getting out in the middle of the lake, OK?"

"OK," Amy agreed solemnly, repressing the urge to say more.

They slowly and silently steered the green canoe away from shore and toward the middle of the lake where the other canoes careened in wide circles around each other. Erica and Amy started circling also, but soon veered off toward the side when Amy went back to talking. Erica managed to quiet her, but they had so much trouble steering successfully back toward the center, they ended up just circling in one corner of the lake. After several minutes, Erica suddenly looked around.

"Where did everybody go?" she asked quizzically. "It couldn't be lunch yet—did you hear the whistle?" She turned back for an answer, just in time to see Amy's

paddle slip out of her hands into the water.

"Oh my gosh!" Amy shrieked. "I dropped my paddle! This is so horrible!" She reached for its sinking black form, causing the boat to rock.

Erica gripped the sides of the canoe. "Don't try to grab it—you'll tip the boat! It's gone, OK? I don't think you can get it now."

"But now I can't paddle, and we're going to go crooked, and you're all mad at me!" exclaimed Amy. "And we're never going to get anywhere!" She bit her lip, staring wide-eyed at the spot where the paddle had been.

"Gosh, Amy, it's OK," she said, looking across the lake to see if anyone else was near. "I can paddle, I just have to switch back and forth every time, and we're in no hurry—oh there they are! But why are they going in already?" She studied the boats being pulled up on the other side of the lake. A rumble of thunder answered her question.

Amy stiffened. "Was that thunder? Are we going to be caught in a *thunderstorm* out here? That would be really bad. And we can't pull up on these cliffs. We could get struck by lightning!" Her eyes widened and her mouth clamped shut in fear.

"I know!" Erica was already paddling, frantically steering them toward the opposite shore as it began to rain. She could see their counselor waving and shouting hysterically at them, so she waved and tried to shout over the thunder that they

were coming back as fast as possible.

The thunderclouds opened and rain poured down, drenching them both. While Erica paddled as hard as she could, Amy sat shaking in the back, her soaked ponytail plastered to her head, her mouth strangely silent despite the fact that no one had told her to be quiet. Erica didn't notice, concentrating only on getting them back to shore, ignoring that with each stroke of her paddle, her arms became more and more exhausted.

Amy, staring at the water with large, frightened eyes, began to notice that they were going slower. She looked at Erica. "Are you getting tired?" she asked.

Erica turned to face her, panting. "I . . . I am, a little." She clutched her paddle. "But I'm OK, don't worry."

"No," said Amy, her voice shaking but at the same time firm, "*you* don't worry. I'm all rested up now, so I'll go faster than you're going. And I know what you're thinking, but don't worry about that either. I don't talk when I'm really scared."

Erica smiled at Amy, a grateful look in her eyes. "Go Amy," she said quietly,

handing over the paddle.

Amy took it and paddled with all her strength, fueled by the bright lightning flashes along the horizon and the frightening sound of thunder coming closer. She propelled them smoothly through the water, hardly swerving at all. Erica sat huddled in her seat in the front, crossing her fingers. Both were completely soaked as they finally neared the beach.

Several girls had run out into the water to meet them. Their voices rose in a happy clamor of relief and excitement, drowning out the counselor's stern words about always listening for the whistle and watching the weather and holding onto paddles. Amy was exhausted, so the girls pulled the canoe in to shore.

Erica and Amy walked together as the girls trekked back to their cabin, to the disbelief of Becky behind them. Erica didn't mind Amy's idle chatter as much, knowing that she had seen the other side of Amy, the serious, frightened side. Amy, walking along in her soggy clothes and wet bare feet, was just glad to have someone who listened. ☸

Night Lives

By Natalie Fine

When the sky was full of diamonds,
We went dancing on the cobblestone streets.
The world was filled with laughter and music
and whispering couples.
The spicy food,
The sweet chocolate,
And the strong aroma of coffee.
The lights on the water.
We sat under the massive stone archways, lit with light.
We turned around and around beneath the statues
of the gods of a past world.
We ran over bridges,
And cast stones at the wavering reflections of ourselves.
We slept on a doorstep.
In front of us, the city was alive with color and people.
Above us,
The sky was full of diamonds
And the moon.

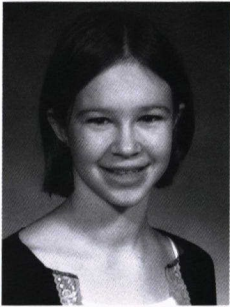


Natalie Fine, 12
Denver, Colorado

Parting Is Such Sweet Sorrow

By Hannah Postel

Illustrated by Leigh Marie Marshall



Hannah Postel, 12
Madison, Wisconsin



Leigh Marie Marshall, 13
San Francisco, California

I STARE AT THE FLICKERING candle, the small light throwing echoes onto the flimsy curtain wavering with our movements. That cloth is all that separates us from the audience; they're out there, waiting, waiting for us. I love focusing, letting the director's voice flow around me, dropping into my character's body.

There he is! Romeo, staring longingly, lovingly, up at Juliet on her balcony. He doesn't know she adores him yet. That's what's terrific about acting in plays—I know what my character doesn't yet.

"Step toward your character and join hands," our director, Anne, says. I let my character develop in my mind until his words spring from my mouth as if he's living inside of me. I'm here to bring Romeo to life in my own world. "Let a line form in your mind and let the character tell you how he would say it. Now come back . . . on the count of six, open your eyes onto the candle," Anne tells us.

The reddish-gold fire shimmers in the dark. The line is there in my head, a gift from Romeo—"O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright! It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night like a rich jewel in an Ethiope's ear. Beauty too rich for use, for earth too dear."

Everyone says his or her line in turn: Rachel, the stately prince, with the play's opening words; Tanya, the boisterous nurse, enjoying a dirty joke; and Sasha, the wise friar, contemplating man and nature.



I give extra strength to the lines addressing Romeo and Juliet's love

"OK," Anne whispers, "you've prepared so long for this. You're going to be awesome—especially since this is the last performance!" The cast mingles, hugging, wishing good luck, and sharing pre-performance nerves. My Juliet, Holly, throws herself into a chair and sighs.

"I'm just so sick of Juliet. Anne isn't letting me do what I want with the character."

I turn to face her. "Holly, don't say that. I wanted to be Juliet, don't you remember? I prepared so hard for the tryout—I was miserable when I got immature, rash

Romeo instead. At least you got the part you wanted!"

I can't believe I just said that to Holly, one of my best friends in the cast. I hold my breath, waiting for her response, hoping she won't be mad. But she stares at me and says, "Well, maybe there was a reason I got Juliet and you didn't. Think about it." She walks away from me.

I collapse into the chair Holly just abandoned. What's going to happen to the performance? Holly and I need all the chemistry we can muster to make the audience believe in the play's world. Someone hugs my shoulders. I hope it's Holly, but it isn't.


A few minutes later, we line up for the march-in. Anne encourages all the cast members, making her way back to tell me I'll be great. Tears prick at my eyes but I brush them away roughly. I know I can't play this part without my heart in it and without closeness to Holly.

The lights dim and the audience's chatter fades. The actors' whispers fill the jammed backstage. Tybalt rushes for her forgotten cloak and everyone adjusts hats, swords, vests. I fiddle with my iridescent cloak and the silk ribbons on my velvet tunic as Purcell's *Funeral March for Queen Mary* swells. Usually it's hard not to laugh when everyone starts clapping and whistling as we proceed down the aisle. Tonight, though, it's easy for me to keep a

straight face.

The play begins and seems as though it's on fast-forward. The Montagues and Capulets brawl in the streets, Romeo and his friends sneak into their sworn enemies' party, Juliet and Romeo are struck by love. Holly and I aren't acting to our full potential together, and I know it. As the balcony scene begins, I realize what I have to do. I give extra strength to the lines addressing Romeo and Juliet's love, playing them differently from ever before. As I say, "My life were better ended by their hate than death prorogued, wanting of thy love," Juliet smiles at Romeo, but I know it's also Holly smiling at me.

The play races on until the "banished" scene. This is the hardest moment for Romeo, finding out he's exiled from Verona for having murdered Tybalt. Every line slips off my tongue so naturally it's as if I *am* Romeo and this banishment is happening to me. I feel everything: his anguish, despair, and guilt. I can't believe I won't have a chance to do this again.

I stumble offstage afterward, amazed by the beauty of the scene. My friends crush me into a hug, and I realize I'm overwhelmed with love. Love for my friends and their love for me. Romeo and Juliet's doomed love. And, most surprising and extraordinary to me, my love for Romeo. 

Playing Periwinkle

By Caitlin Peterson

Illustrated by Lydia Trottmann

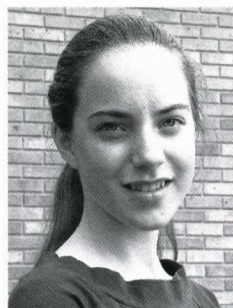
I REMEMBER THE FIRST TIME we played Periwinkle. I was ten and my sister Lou was eleven. We were just under a year apart, eleven months exactly. It was her birthday and her party had just ended, leaving just the two of us and a pile of presents. I picked one up, a funny little stuffed pig, and leaned it over by Lou. "It's Pig's birthday, too!" I giggled. Lou rolled her eyes in an attempt to look mature but ended up laughing with me. After living together for our entire lives, we were both pretty good at figuring out what the other one was thinking. I glanced at the table set up for the party, then at the pig, then at Lou. "Sounds fun, right?" I asked her. She knew what I meant, and we raced through the house, picking up every stuffed animal we could carry and dumping them on the table. "Now the pig can have a party, right Lou?" I said.

She surveyed the heap. "Sure," she told me with all the authority of being one year older, "but not here. They need a house of their own. Like, oh, somewhere in the woods."

So we picked up the animals once again, and started walking through the woods near our house in search of a suitable spot for a party. Finally, Lou paused under a big tree. "This looks like a good spot." It didn't seem any different from any of the other spots under any of the other trees that we had passed, but I didn't want to argue with Lou on her birthday. We laughed as we arranged the animals around an imaginary table, moving their little arms to eat invisible cake. Suddenly, Lou looked up. "What time is it, Jen?" she asked me.



Caitlin Peterson, 13
Appleton, Wisconsin



Lydia Trottmann, 13
Fort Collins, Colorado



We laughed as we arranged the animals around an imaginary table

I looked at my watch. "Six-forty-five." We both knew what that meant. We were forty-five minutes late for supper, and Mom was not going to be happy with us. Lou took off through the trees, and I followed.

AS WE WERE lying in our bunk beds that night, almost asleep, I thought of something. "Lou!"

"I'm tired, Jen. Go back to sleep."

"No, listen! We left all the animals out there! I don't want to leave them out all night; what if it rains?"

"Well, what do you want to do about it—go back and get them?" Lou said sar-

castically.

"Now?" I asked incredulously. "Lou, it's the middle of the night."

She swung her legs over the side of the top bunk and jumped off. "I was kidding, but I guess we could. It's now or never, if it rains."

That was true. "OK, wait for me."

We tiptoed barefoot into the kitchen. Lou rummaged around in the drawers, looking for a strong flashlight, then we slid on our shoes and slipped out the door.

The forest path looked eerie in the dark. I had second thoughts about our plan, but once Lou made up her mind to do something, there was no stopping her,

so we continued until we reached the tree. Looking at the animals reminded me of how much fun we were having. We had never really finished Pig's party, so I turned to Lou. "Do you think we could maybe play a little, while we're out here?"

She stared at me like I was crazy. "What if Mom and Dad find out?"

"We'd be in enough trouble already," I pointed out.

She shrugged, always willing for an adventure. "Sounds fine to me!"

We sat down in the dark. It wasn't really so scary after all, I noticed. Once we propped up the flashlight in between us, it lit up the surrounding woods well enough so we could be sure that nothing was hiding out there, and the house was pretty close by. We played for almost an hour when Lou decided that we had better start back, but both of us were sad to leave. That was probably what made Lou say, "Jen? Let's try to come out here again tomorrow night."

And it was what made me say, "Yes."

"This is almost like a little world," Lou said thoughtfully. "Maybe we'd better name it."

I thought for a while. "I don't know. Do you have any ideas?"

"I'm thinking."

We eventually decided on Periwinkle, because as Lou said, "Periwinkle is such a pretty color, but I don't see it very often. When I see it, I think of thousands of possibilities."

TWO YEARS LATER, we were still playing Periwinkle. Sometimes during the day, I was embarrassed to think of what some of the kids at school would say about such a "baby" game. But the nighttime always made it seem special, even magical, and I couldn't even think of ending the game. We never really talked about it, but I think Lou felt the same way.

We had improved the game since that first night on Lou's birthday. Lou and I made popsicle-stick furniture for the stuffed animals, and walls to separate different rooms. Sometimes the Periwinkle characters would go to school, sometimes they would play, and sometimes they would even go on vacation and take a trip somewhere. We made different cardboard buildings for everywhere they went.

One hot August night, Lou and I appeared at our tree to find nothing. Everything was gone. We couldn't think of anything to do but stare in shock. Who or what could have done this? Dog tracks covered the muddy ground. I turned to show Lou and see what she was thinking, but she was not there. She was already running back toward the house, fists clenched. I sighed, blinking away a tear as I looked at the mess, then I followed her.

Back in our bedroom, Lou was still angry. I was upset too, but I wanted to try to calm her down. "Listen. It's not the end of the world," I told her. "What did we have when we started playing Periwinkle on your birthday? Nothing, remember?"



"Listen. It's not the end of the world," I told her

We added all the stuff later. We can rebuild it. Don't let some stray dog or whatever it was that ran through our game wreck Periwinkle for you."

Lou shook her head fiercely. "It won't be the same." I saw there was nothing I could do to change Lou's opinion, so I got back in my bed and tried to fall asleep.

THE NEXT DAY, I tried to talk to Lou about Periwinkle again. She either turned away or changed the subject whenever I mentioned it. Frustrated, I grabbed a bag of popsicle sticks and glue and stashed it under my bed. Lou saw but didn't say a word.

That night, I made the trek to our tree alone. As I sat, patiently working on a new chair, I was sure that I felt someone watching me. I turned around and found myself face to face with Lou. "I kind of missed Periwinkle," she told me. "Can I help?"

I shoved the bag of sticks her way. "Take what you need."

In three weeks, we rebuilt the entire world of Periwinkle. It was a lot faster than the original furniture, but we knew exactly what we were doing this time, so the job went faster. We stood and surveyed our finished work. I knew Lou would have high standards, so I braced

myself for criticism and insults. Instead, I was surprised to find Lou flinging her arms around me. "It's perfect! I'm so glad you didn't let me quit."

I felt the same way.

TWENTY YEARS LATER

I LOOKED AT Lou and laughed nervously. "This is the place, right?"

She nodded. "Of course!"

Lou and I were staying with our daughters at our old house for the last week of the summer, to visit our parents. We thought that because our girls were the same ages we had been the first time we played, it would be fun to introduce them to Periwinkle. They loved it. My parents had kept all our old stuffed animals, so we brought out the original characters for our girls to use. Lindsey, my daughter, laughed excitedly. "Look!" she said to Jessica, Lou's daughter. "There's little furniture and everything!" They sat down, instantly absorbed in the game.

While Lou and I watched the girls play, I felt strangely envious. They were having so much fun. I missed our midnight games of Periwinkle. When I looked over at Lou, she had a strange look on her face. I instantly guessed what she was thinking. "Should we?" I asked her.

"Why not?"

All the rest of that day, we kept our secret hidden. But that night, at midnight, Lou and I tiptoed out the old door, carry-

ing a flashlight and a pile of animals. It was hard not to giggle. Imagine two grown women, sneaking around with stuffed animals like little children! We hadn't been on the old path for a long time, but neither of us had forgotten the way.

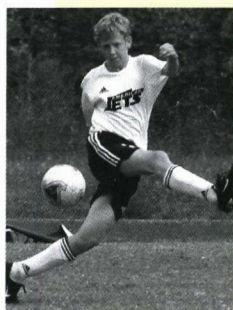
When we got to the old tree, we spread out the furniture and animals, just like we used to do. We hadn't told our daughters the time of night when we used to have our adventures. We didn't want to inspire them to try to sneak out, and end up lost. It's funny how being a parent can make you more careful about those types of things.

We felt a bit self-conscious at first, but the feeling quickly wore off. Lou and I sat there for hours, laughing and remembering funny times from when we were younger. When the sun started to spread light in the forest, we knew that we should head back to the house before someone noticed that we were gone.

AT THE END of the week, we had to go back home. Lou and I returned to work, and the kids had to go back to school. A strict schedule was almost a shock after our week of leisure, but I got used to it quickly. I had a lot of work to do, and it took up most of my time. But even after months of being back at my job, I knew that the memory of our final game of Periwinkle would stay with me for a long, long time. ❀

Penalty Kick

By Hudson Jetton



Hudson Jetton, 12
Hoover, Alabama

Overtime.
Golden Goal.
As I place the ball in a circle,
I think about where I should place the shot.

top left
bottom left
top right
bottom right

I wait for the whistle
my team is silent
but the crowd is roaring

pressure is on
nerves rush through me

suddenly the crowd silences
the whistle blows

I sprint toward the ball
the crowd stands

my shot

swift

quick

hard

and low right

the keeper dives for the ball

I turn my head

don't even watch

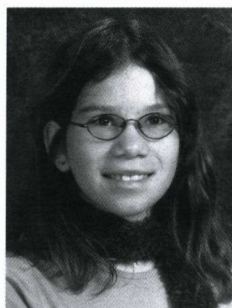
I know

I won the game.

Oreo

By **Molly Ostertag**

Illustrated by **Evan Mistur**



Molly Ostertag, 12
Milan, New York



Evan Mistur, 13
Troy, New York

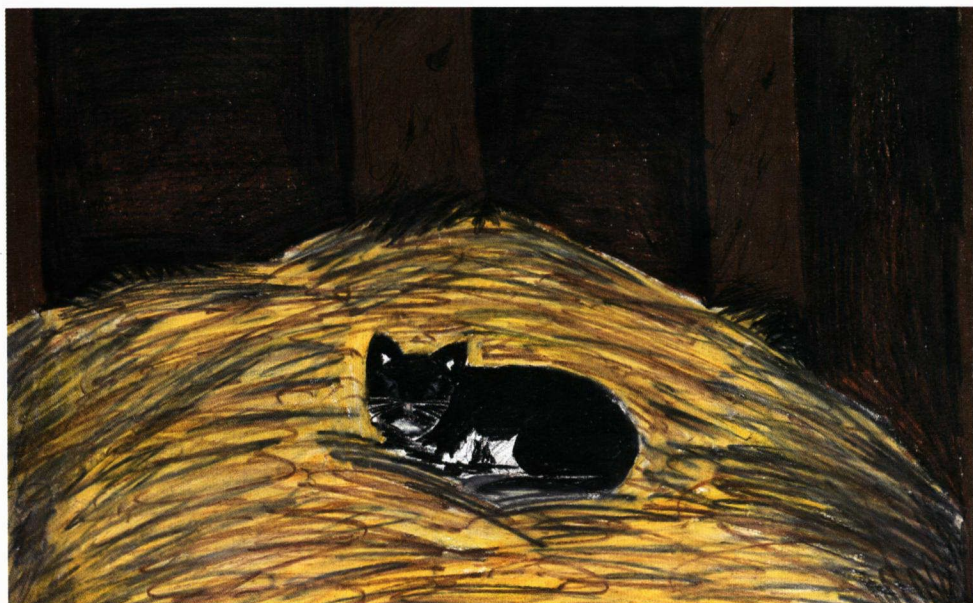
THE BARN WAS DARK, but a warm and welcoming darkness. The hay piled up for the horses smelled sweet and soft. The barn door was slightly ajar, just enough for a small bedraggled traveler. The horses snorted in their sleep, but the hay was inviting and the traveler was soon asleep, breathing in the fresh-cut smell.

MOLLY WAS HOMESICK. She had been at camp for two days, and really missed her parents. She decided to go to the farm, where she could play with the kittens and wouldn't have to talk to anyone. When the first-period bell rang, she walked down the road to the farm, absorbed in self-pity. Outside the barn was a kitten. Molly bent down to pet her and went inside. There were a few people in the barn, holding kittens. Molly spotted a small black-and-white kitten, who wasn't being held. She scooped him up and looked into blue-gray eyes like her own. She petted the kitten's black ears and he shut his eyes in contentment. She had made a friend.

A week later, Molly had made lots of friends in her cabin, but still visited the kitten a lot. He was christened Oreo. She had completely fallen in love with him. Eventually, she called her parents.

"Mom, can I pleeeeeease have this kitten?" On the other end of the phone, her mom sighed.

"Maybe." Soon, maybe turned to yes, and Molly was very happy. Camp would end soon, and Molly would spend the rest of her summer in Nova Scotia. At the end of the summer, when



A small black-and-white kitten woke up in his bed of hay

she came back from her summer house, they would pick Oreo up. She was prepared to wait as long as it took to get Oreo.

Camp ended, and Molly hugged Oreo, telling him to wait for her. In their summer house in Nova Scotia, Molly patiently waited for the summer to be over. One night, a week from getting Oreo, she had a dream. Oreo had run away from camp. He had forgotten that she was going to adopt him, so he ran away. In her dream, Molly chased after him for a long time. Finally, he remembered who she was, and he stopped. She caught up, and he jumped into her arms.

The following day, a phone call came from camp.

"Hi, Molly. Are you still getting this cat?"

"Oreo? Yep."

"Well, I have some very sad news. Oreo ran away. He's been away for two weeks, but we couldn't find your phone number."

"Oreo?" Molly said, her voice faint. "Th- the black-and-white male? Are you sure?"

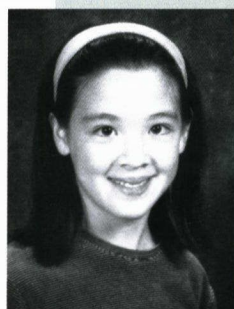
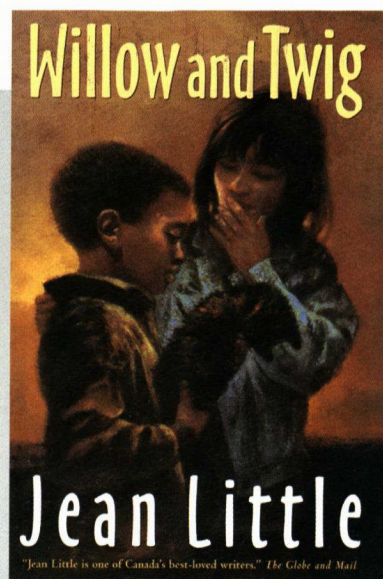
"Yes. Can I talk to a parent?" Numbly, Molly handed the phone to her dad and collapsed onto the couch.

A SMALL black-and-white kitten woke up in his bed of hay. He was quite big now, and catching mice. He had just vaguely remembered someone, a girl, who had loved him so much . . . He felt a shadow of remorse at leaving her, but it was soon swallowed up by kitten dreams and thoughts, and he had forgotten it in the morning. ❀

Book Review

By Susanna Cai

Willow and Twig by Jean Little; Viking: New York, 2000; \$15.99



Susanna Cai, 11
Portland, Oregon

MOST PEOPLE CAN RELATE to having an annoying little brother that is “Velcro-ed” to you wherever you go, or to counting on your grandma for love. But Willow doesn’t only need to count on her grandma for love, she and her brother, nicknamed Twig, need to count on her to survive!

Willow and her four-year-old brother, whom everyone thinks is stupid because he can’t talk yet, are living with an elderly caretaker, Maisie, in a cramped one-room apartment. The children’s mother, a drug addict, is out in the world seemingly unaware that she has just broken yet another promise that means everything to her kids. This time, the kids *know* she is never coming back, never.

In daycare or kindergarten, most kids worry that their parents won’t come to pick them up, but that usually never happens. Only Willow and Twig’s mom obviously has no idea how much coming back means to a kid.


After about four months, Maisie dies. Willow and Twig are forced to turn to the police for help. After the threat of being sent off to two separate foster homes, Willow decides to call her long-lost grandma who supposedly never wants to see her again,

or so her mother has told her. Until that telephone call, Grandma doesn't even know Twig exists! Even though their grandma is happy to take them in, Willow is still scared that she will get angry at disruptive Twig and send them away. Once they seem to be settled in with blind Uncle Hum and kind Gram, other people come along who could spell trouble. Willow is at first happy to discover a neighbor her own age, until Sabrina Marr lies to her and runs off in a huff. And then Aunt Con, her grandmother's wretched sister who absolutely hates children, decides to move in with them.

At this point in the book, I didn't know what would happen to Willow and Twig. Would Aunt Con convince Gram and Uncle Hum to get rid of them? Would Twig push too many buttons and get them both in trouble? Willow's only hope now was to pray. Pray that Aunt Con would find love in her heart to let them stay. Pray that she and Twig would be loved. Pray that Sabrina would turn out to be nice. Pray.

When I read this book I placed myself in Willow's position and learned how other children might feel. How other children in our world struggle for food and water while we take it for granted. How others long to be loved, to have friends, to just sit down and laugh with their family members, while that is built into our daily lives.

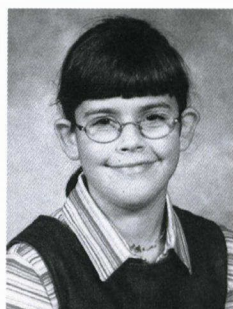
This book really made me think about what else is happening in the world while we sit down to play a game or to watch TV. Not everybody has the same privileges, and not everybody's family looks the same. When you read this book you might get the same message I did, or you might have a different point of view.

No matter what, though, I will bet you will find *Willow and Twig* to be a fascinating story about two children who overcome lots of obstacles and help to create a family they can count on to be safe and happy. 

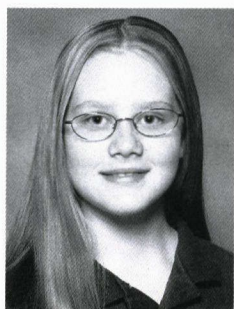
Persistence

By **Preston Craig**

Illustrated by **Elizabeth Wright**



Preston Craig, 10
Charleston, South Carolina



Elizabeth Wright, 13
Las Vegas, Nevada

JESSICA MORGAN WAS TEN years old and was already sure she was no good at anything. Her parents were eminent historians who studied the Civil War. They each had written numerous books and articles on the subject of Civil War history. Everyone Jessica knew seemed to admire them, including Jessica herself. To Jessica, her parents appeared to have limitless confidence and skill. She, on the other hand, had never felt successful or competent at anything she tried. Sometimes, Jessica wondered how she could be so different from her parents.

One hot summer afternoon as Jessica sat reading, the telephone on the wall beside her rang loudly. She picked it up on the second ring, placing a bookmark in her book. "Hello?"

"Jessica, it's Cassie."

"Oh, hi." Ten-year-old Cassie Parker had been Jessica's closest friend for six years.

The girls chatted for a few minutes, and then Cassie said, "You know my brother's old kayak? Well, we're getting rid of it."

"That beat-up one with the wooden paddle? Why?" Jessica was surprised. She knew he loved that old kayak. She herself had seen him using it.

"My brother Aaron got a brand-new kayak for his eighth birthday. Now my parents are dying to get the old one out of the garage. I thought because you live right on the creek and you don't have a kayak, maybe you'd like it."

Jessica hesitated. She didn't know the first thing about kayak-



Jessica's heart leapt. She was really getting the kayak!

ing. What should she do? Suddenly, she heard herself say, "Sure, I'll take it. My parents have always said I could have a kayak if I wanted one, but I've never had the chance to get one."

"Now you've got a great chance. So, you want it?"

"Yes, I do!" Jessica's heart leapt. She was really getting the kayak!

"OK." Even if she couldn't see Cassie's face, Jessica was almost positive her best friend was smiling by her pleased tone. "I'll bring it over Saturday morning at ten. Is that OK?"

"Yeah, sure! Bye."

"Bye."

Jessica hung up the phone again and considered opening her book, but she was too excited to read. Tomorrow she would have her very own kayak. Visions filled her mind—visions of herself moving silently, gracefully through the marsh creeks behind her house, cutting the water smoothly. Visions of racing Cassie time and time again, propelling herself swiftly past Cassie's red kayak, winning dozens of races.

Then the dreams were abruptly cut short.

What if she was horrible at kayaking . . . just like everything else she'd ever tried?

The visions changed to pictures of herself floundering in the water, having tipped over her kayak, of herself running into the banks of the creeks and getting stuck in the mud.

Jessica knew she was rarely any good at anything, and, now that she thought

about it, was positive that she would be as bad at kayaking as she was at video games and tennis and soccer and everything else she tried to do.

All her friends were good at something. Cassie was a straight-A student, Ginny was the best pitcher on the local baseball team, and Lila was always talking about her most recent experiences climbing mountains. They had never been mean to Jessica when she failed to do something as well as they had done it, but she nevertheless felt embarrassed every time they looked at her, smiling kindly, and said, "Come on, Jess, you know you can do it. Just try really hard."

Jessica's mind drifted back to last April, when she and her friend Lila had gone to their hometown's annual spring festival. There, among all the usual attractions, was something new—a climbing wall. "Hey, let's give it a try!" Lila had said enthusiastically, stepping forward. Jessica had had a sinking feeling, but she had agreed because she didn't want to appear as though she were afraid to try.

As the girls neared the wall, Lila confidently stepped up to the more challenging side, while Jessica uneasily approached the easier one. They were given harnesses to put on, and began climbing.

The movements felt unnatural to Jessica. As hard as she tried, she couldn't seem to find any handholds. It seemed that she stayed in one spot forever, awkwardly attempting to move upward. Out of the corner of her eye, she had seen Lila, scrambling steadily higher.

As Jessica tentatively pulled herself up another notch, she heard a sound that made her heart sink. It was the ring of the bell from the top of the climbing wall. That meant Lila had already reached the top and was on her way back down. Jessica, convinced she couldn't make it any further, gave up and headed toward the ground. Even now, the memory of that day made her cringe.

She was still thinking about that day, and about how she would probably have a similar experience with kayaking, when she went downstairs for supper that night. Only Jessica's mother, Elizabeth, was at the dinner table—presumably her father, James, was still working hard in his study. "Hello, Jessica," said her mother, putting a plate of spaghetti in front of Jessica as she sat down.

"Hi. Cassie called. They're giving away Aaron's old kayak."

"Oh? Why?"

"Aaron got a new one for his birthday. Well, anyway, Cassie called me to offer the kayak to me. If it's OK, she's bringing it over tomorrow."

Her mom smiled. "I hope you'll like it."

The rest of dinner passed in silence—they were both hungry, and felt no need to talk. After eating, Jessica read her book and watched television awhile, and then went to bed, apprehensive about the next morning.

JESSICA WOKE abruptly at the insistent ring of the alarm on the clock radio sitting on her nightstand, which read

eight o'clock. She got out of bed, showered, and changed into shorts and a T-shirt, and by that time it was eight-thirty. Only an hour and a half until my kayak gets here, she thought nervously.

She waited, almost hoping that Cassie would be late—but no, she arrived ten minutes early, laboriously dragging two kayaks and two paddles. "I was only counting on getting Aaron's kayak, not yours, too," Jessica said as she opened the door and stepped outside to take her new kayak and paddle.

"No, they're not both yours," panted Cassie, passing her the blue kayak and one of the two paddles. "I brought mine so we could go together in the creek behind your house. I'll teach you how to do it."

Jessica did not think Cassie could have said anything more terrible. Now Cassie would actually see her kayaking. This is the worst thing you have ever done to me, Cassie, Jessica thought angrily, but she grinned with a huge effort and said in a voice of forced excitement, "Awesome!"

They went down to the Morgans' dock, and Cassie held the kayak still while Jessica climbed in hesitantly. Cassie smiled warmly at her best friend. "Come on, Jessica," she said encouragingly, confidently sitting down in her own boat. "Don't be afraid. Have you been in a canoe before?"

Jessica nodded mutely, remembering summer camp and an unfortunate collision between her canoe and a rock.

"Hold the paddle like this—no, put your hands farther apart—yes, that's



She always felt calm and peaceful when she kayaked among the herons and minnows

right. Now push the water back, alternating which side you do it on—left, right, left, right.” Jessica obeyed nervously, and found her kayak moving forward. “Now, to turn left, you paddle on the right side two or three times, and you do the same thing to turn right, except you paddle on the left side. Oh—are you OK?”

Jessica nodded, looking defiantly over her shoulder at Cassie from where her kayak was lodged, stuck in the mud. “Back-paddle!” Cassie called.

“What’s back-paddle?” Jessica’s heart pounded. Please don’t let Cassie have to help me get out of this, she thought frantically.

“Paddle the opposite of what you’ve been doing—push forwards!”

“Oh, OK . . .” With every ounce of determination she had, Jessica thrust the wooden paddle forward. Her heart leapt as the kayak actually began to move. I did it, I back-paddled! she thought, unable to believe it.

And with a few quick movements of the paddle, she was speeding down the creek again, Cassie at her side, both of them laughing hard.

THE NEXT WEEK, Jessica couldn’t stop grinning. She finally felt good at something, and she was hopeful that she might even have a talent for kayaking. She’d been setting her alarm clock early and going out alone to the creek every day since Cassie had shown her how to use a kayak. She practiced in the quiet, twisting marsh, under the pale blue morning sky,

with tiny pewter fish zipping around her. The only sounds were the gentle lapping of the blue-gray water against the sides of the kayak and the sandy banks of the creeks, the shrill calls of the seagulls as they dove and swerved above Jessica, and her paddle hitting the water with a soft splash. It was still and beautiful, wild and untouched, and she always felt calm and peaceful when she kayaked among the herons and minnows and big blue crabs. With each passing day, Jessica felt more confident and skilled.

By noon on Tuesday, Jessica was itching to go kayaking with Cassie again and finally called her. Aaron, Cassie’s brother, answered, and knew by the simple “Hi, Aaron” at the other end that it was Jessica. He knew her voice from the many times she’d called Cassie, and handed the phone to Cassie without Jessica even having to ask him to do so.

“Hi, Jessica.” Cassie sounded puzzled. “What’s up?”

“Oh, I just wanted to go kayaking again, that’s all. Could you go with me if you’ve got time?” Please let her say yes, I want to race her, Jessica thought.

“Yeah, sure. I’ll be over in a few minutes.”

“I’ll be waiting on the dock.”

“See you.” They both hung up their phones, and Jessica raced outside and sat down on the dock, dangling bare feet into the cloudy marsh water, her kayak tied to the sturdiest board.

It took a little over five minutes for Cassie to arrive, and even less for Jessica

to untie her boat, hop in, and start sculling around.

"Race you to that dock with the crab trap on it," said Cassie suddenly.

"OK." Jessica felt confident. She was not just certain that she was capable of winning, she was certain that she would win, by a long shot.

"On your mark . . . get set," Cassie said loudly. Jessica tensed up, ready, arms set to move. "Go!"

And they were off, at first side by side, but then Cassie began pulling ahead.

Jessica's self-assurance that she would win lessened slightly, but she worked herself yet harder, and with a massive effort, she began gaining on Cassie.

This made her grin, but the real moment of happiness came when she sped past Cassie and, with one quick back-paddle to slow herself down, stopped.

Jessica had won.

Cassie cheered as she halted beside Jessica. "Nice one!"

Jessica blushed embarrassedly. "Thanks." She might have looked shy, but underneath that, she was bursting with pride at her skill.

JESSICA'S FATHER, James, met her in her bedroom that night. "Jessica, I saw you this afternoon, kayaking with Cassie."

She turned off the radio that was blasting rock-and-roll. "You did? Do you think I'm good?"

"I think you're very talented." At this, Jessica had to smile, slightly embarrassed

but altogether pleased. "In fact, what I came up to talk to you about is kayaking."

"What is it?" Jessica was very curious.

"There's a kayak race for ages nine through twelve in two weeks; I read about it in the newspaper. The prize if you win first place is a brand-new kayak and paddle. It starts at two in the afternoon and it's down at the park. You might want to think about entering."

"Maybe I will," Jessica replied. Competitions weren't usually her thing, but this sounded like fun. "Thanks for telling me."

Her father started toward the door, but then turned. "You are very good at kayaking, Jessica. I think you could win that race."

"Thanks."

When her dad left, Jessica stretched out on her bed, resting her chin in her hand. She was seriously considering entering this kayak race. She was hopeful she could win, or at least come in at second or third place.

Jessica suddenly leapt to her feet. She had made up her mind.

She was going to enter.

THE NEXT FEW mornings, Jessica woke up at seven because she wanted to practice for the race with no one else around. Every morning she followed the same routine, laboriously dragging the kayak from the garage to the dock and speeding down the creeks.

But on the fourth morning, something happened.

Jessica was going along confidently, fast

and smooth. She was full of energy and excitement—in fact, a little too full.

She was so excited, staring up at the blue sky, that she didn't notice the rock. She hit it, and her kayak flipped violently over.

In a split second, Jessica was in the cloudy marsh, stunned from the sudden impact. She was trapped underneath her upside-down kayak. She couldn't see, hear, or breathe underwater. She writhed frantically in the pitch darkness, desperately trying to get to the air that was only a little way above her. Her heart pounded in terror as she kicked and flailed her arms. She slammed sideways into the kayak, banging her arm and head against it.

Miraculously, one of Jessica's wild thrashes brought her clear of the kayak and upward. Her head broke the surface of the water, and she gratefully inhaled clean, cold air that smelled of the marsh, her clothes and hair clinging to her skin.

Gasping, Jessica shakily flipped her kayak the right way up and found the paddle. She climbed weakly in and for a moment sat there motionless, unable to believe what had happened. Suddenly, she wanted nothing more than to be away from the kayak and the marsh, as far away as possible. She began to paddle back home.

When she got home, she threw the kayak and paddle in the garage and stormed upstairs to her room. "Jessica?" called her mother, but Jessica ignored her and slammed and locked the bedroom door behind her.

Why did I decide to kayak? she thought as water dripped down her back. The memory of the darkness of the water, the inability to breathe, the utter terror, was still fresh in her mind. I won't do it anymore, I won't. I'm never kayaking again.

She was sure of that.

FOR THE NEXT two days, Jessica didn't kayak at all. In fact, she rarely came out of her room and didn't call Cassie, Ginny, or Lila once.

On the third day, Jessica's mom came into her bedroom and sat down on the bed beside Jessica. "Jessica, what's wrong? What happened?"

"My kayak tipped over when I was practicing the other day," she replied shortly.

"Oh. Well, why haven't you gone back to the creek?"

"What if I tip over again?"

"Jessica, you can't let one setback get in your way. You've got to keep going. You can't give up now. You're good at kayaking. You just made a mistake. Everybody makes mistakes, Jessica."

"You and Dad never seem to," Jessica replied, almost under her breath.

"It may seem that way to you, but it's not true. Your dad and I have both had disappointments and made mistakes. Do you know how many times I've had to revise the books I've written, or how many rejection letters your father and I have gotten from publishers over the years? It's hard not to give up, but if you really want something, you've got to keep trying. You

should get out there and try again, Jessica." Her mother tried to sound cheerful and upbeat.

"I don't want to!"

"The only way you can overcome a fear is to face it. Face your fear of kayaking, Jessica. Remember, even if you lose the race, you still entered and tried."

Jessica crossed her arms over her chest decisively. No one could make her enter that race, not even her mother. "I don't want to enter," she repeated stubbornly.

"All right, Jessica, I won't force you to enter, but just remember this. Failing when you've given your best effort is much more honorable than failing without trying." Jessica's mother stood and left the room.

Jessica sat there on the bed, staring at the white door, cracked a little ajar. I still won't enter, she thought defiantly, but deep down she wasn't so sure anymore. Her mother's words kept echoing in her head.

That night, it was hard for Jessica to sleep. She tossed and turned, thinking about what her mother had said to her. There was a gnawing feeling inside her, a nagging feeling that kept telling her that her mother was right.

The next morning, Jessica decided to call Cassie. Jessica waited a moment, and then heard "Hello?" from the other end of the line. It was Cassie's voice.

"Hi, it's Jessica."

"Oh, hi, Jessica. What's up?"

And Jessica spilled out everything, about the race and her fall from the

kayak, about her talk with her mother and her feelings for the past three days. "And I'm still scared about falling out of the kayak, Cassie, and I don't know what to do," she finished.

There was silence from Cassie for a moment, as though she were trying to find the right words. And then she spoke. "You're good at kayaking, Jessica. I think you should enter."

"But I . . . have you ever tipped over?" Jessica sputtered.

"Yes, I have, and it scared me, too. But you've got to keep trying."

"Cassie, don't you understand?" Jessica's voice was pleading. "Don't you understand how I feel?"

"I understand, but I still think you should enter. I saw how much you like being in a kayak. You've finally found something you like. Why don't you stick with it and get really good at it? Who knows how good you could get?"

Jessica was silent.

"Jessica? Are you still there?"

"Yeah," Jessica said in a very quiet voice. "I'm thinking about what you said."

"Did I sound like I was lecturing you? If I did . . ."

"No, Cassie. No, it's not that."

"Then what? I'm not telling you to enter, I just think it would be right."

"I guess it would be."

"Yeah, and you're talented."

Jessica smiled, flattered. "Really? You think so?"

"Yeah, I do, honest. Go ahead, Jessica, go ahead and enter. It doesn't matter if you

lose—not that I think you will, but . . .”

Jessica laughed. “OK. I think I’ll enter.”

“Good for you. Well . . . bye.”

“Bye.”

Jessica hung up and told her parents that she’d changed her mind, she was going to enter.

As the day of the race drew closer, Jessica’s nervousness mounted. She practiced for hours every day because using up all her energy in kayaking helped her forget—briefly, anyway—about the race.

The evening before the race took place, Jessica was out in the marsh at about seven o’clock, kayaking, when Cassie’s red kayak rounded a bend.

“Hi, Jessica!” she called, coming closer. “I thought you might be out here. I thought you’d maybe want some company.”

“Hi, Cassie! Thanks for coming! Do you want to race?”

They raced each other a few times, and then the girls began to go more slowly down the creek. The dim light of dusk shimmered on Cassie and Jessica’s hair, making Cassie’s sun-streaked blond hair shine and the red highlights in Jessica’s brown hair stand out.

“Oh, Jessica—look!” Surprised, Jessica looked up from her lap, and gasped at what she saw.

The sun had begun to set, smearing streaks of bright, beautiful shades of pink, blue, purple, orange, and scarlet all over the sky, like a masterpiece painted by a giant hand with the prettiest colors there were. The heavens had been spread with a thousand magnificent hues, some dark,

some pastel, some in-between, and the sight took Jessica’s breath away.

As the sunset faded to a dark blue night sky, Cassie said, “Well, I suppose we should go home. Hey, I was thinking that maybe tomorrow I could go to the race with you. Can I?”

“Sure, of course you can!”

“Thanks. See you, Jessica.”

“See you, Cassie.” And Cassie was paddling to her house. Jessica watched her go until she was only a rapidly moving red speck in the distance. Reluctant to leave the marsh, Jessica finally turned her own kayak around and headed for home.

As she climbed into bed that night, Jessica’s thoughts turned toward the race. She couldn’t believe she was actually entering. Jessica had never done anything like this before. Anticipation and nervousness filled her—but there was another feeling, underneath the two emotions she had experienced before. This was something Jessica had never felt. It made her want to grin confidently and boast that she was entering the kayak race. She barely recognized it for what it was.

Pride.

JESSICA WOKE the next morning with a mixture of excitement and apprehension in the pit of her stomach. She was absentminded and quiet all day; the race left no room for any other thoughts in her mind.

At one-forty-five, Jessica, Cassie, and Jessica’s parents got in the car with Jessica’s kayak and paddle tied precariously



She could hear Cassie and her parents cheering her on

ly atop and went down to the park. When they arrived, there were quite a few children lined up along the bank of a wide, straight creek that looked to be about five feet deep. A long scarlet ribbon with red and yellow flags attached to it that was obviously the finish line had been stretched across the width of the creek about thirty meters ahead. Jessica joined the line of children, all with their kayaks in front of them, and saw that every face was taut and anxious. She stood between an extremely short nine-year-old girl who was shifting her weight from foot to foot, and a twelve-year-old boy who was trying to cover up

his nervousness by acting relaxed and slightly bored. She smiled nervously at the girl beside her, and she smiled back, now hopping on her left foot.

The cry of "Get in your kayaks, everyone!" startled Jessica. She looked around sharply and saw a man with a bright red megaphone standing close by. Jessica slid into her kayak and picked up her paddle with shaking hands, forgetting her dreams of winning the race. Cassie and Jessica's family stood nearby with the other spectators, beaming and waving at her. Please just let me finish, she thought, smiling feebly back at them.

"Get ready."

She eased her kayak a couple inches ahead so that she could push off easily out of the sand.

"Get set."

She tightened her grip on the paddle.

"Go!"

And they were off. Suddenly there was no time to be afraid. Adrenaline rushed through Jessica's body as she worked up speed and leaned forward, working her arms harder, the rush of air whipping her hair against her cheeks. A tangle of happiness, excitement, confidence, and hope filled her as water dripped from her paddle onto her lap, going as fast as she could go. She could hear Cassie and her parents cheering her on. Other kayakers disappeared from her mind and vision. She no longer knew or cared whether she was in the lead or not. The finish line was near. The flashy red and yellow flags were whipping in the breeze, so close, so very, very close . . .

And then she passed beneath them.

Jessica stopped her kayak on the bank, panting and smiling. She had done it. She had finished the race. Her parents were there to meet her, smiling, clasping her hands as she climbed out of the kayak. "Jessica," said her father excitedly, "you came in second!"

"I what?"

"You got second!" said her mother, hugging her.

Cassie came running up, grinning

broadly. "Jessica, you did it!" she cried. "I knew you could!"

"Thanks, Cassie, but you're the one who convinced me to enter and everything." Jessica was very happy. In her beat-up, secondhand kayak, only recently having gained confidence in herself, Jessica Morgan, the pessimist, the girl who had thought she couldn't do anything, had not only finished a race, but had come in second.

The man with the megaphone walked up to her. "Good job," he said. "What's your name? How old are you?"

"Jessica Morgan. I'm ten."


"Well, Jessica, that was a great race. We've got a ribbon for you."

"You do? Where?" Her heart pounded excitedly.

"Right this way." As if in a dream, Jessica followed him to the starting line.

They started out with fifth place. A tall eleven-year-old boy got that. The fourth place winner was a black-haired boy of about ten. Jessica saw that the nine-year-old girl she had stood by was awarded third place. And then came second place. Jessica could hardly believe it when her name was announced. She didn't even hear who the first-place winner was.

The red ribbon was placed in the hand Cassie wasn't holding tightly. Looking down, Jessica read the gold letters. **SECOND PLACE.**

She had never dreamed that eleven letters could make her so happy. 

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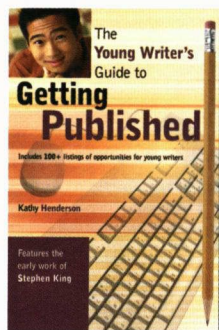
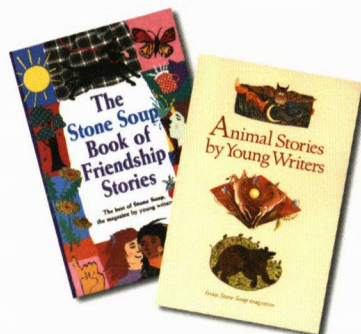
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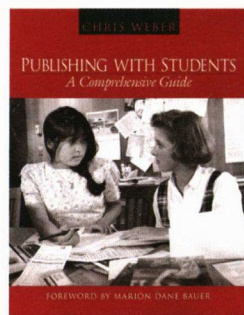
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